

HUNT AMERICA'S ORIGINAL TURKEY FLOCK

OUTDOOR LIFE

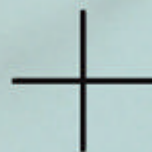
MAY 2015

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COVER STORY
THE BAIT
BOSSSES

These six men will dictate the fishing fortunes of thousands of anglers throughout North America this season.

BY JAMES HALL

COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY
RANDAL FORD

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Come along on a canoe hunt for gobblers whose ancestors helped restore turkey populations across North America.

BY ANDREW MCKEAN

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Competitors at the world's biggest bowfishing tourney reveal why this gritty sport has gained so many devotees.

BY NATALIE KREBS

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THE

LIFE

KATMAI NATIONAL PARK / Alaska

During a week of fishing at the top of the Alaska Peninsula, Heidi and Carter Andrews were determined to catch a legendary rainbow trout. They staked out the last fishing hole on Moraine Creek and Heidi managed to hook this beauty.

"Every time she would try to hold the fish for a photo, it would flop. It actually hit her in the face," says photographer Brian Grossenbacher. Although an uncooperative photo subject, this 4-pound, 25-inch rainbow ended their quest.

WAYPOINT

59°11'28.7"N
155°10'15.3"W





BACKCOUNTRY CALAMITY

► Thank you for doing such a great job of putting into words the risks we face each time we venture into the backcountry ["Editor's Journal," March 2015].

I was elk hunting in Wyoming last fall when my horse fell backward off a steep trail. I landed in the river, and the horse landed on me, breaking my femur.

That day, I was lucky—I was hunting with a companion; otherwise, I would have

died there. Seven hours later, a search-and-rescue team airlifted me to the hospital. I'm just now learning to walk again, and I owe my recovery to a lot of people.

I am framing your article to hang above my desk, because it addresses the risks I must accept when I travel into Wyoming's backcountry. Adventure is much more than shooting a big elk, bear, or sheep. It's about facing risks in a responsible manner and returning home to plan your next adventure.

*Roy Bane
Laramie, WY*

GIVE ME A HAND

► I looked at the reels featured in the Tackle Test and I have to ask: Why do manufacturers continue to make spinning reels with a left-hand retrieve (yes, I know most are ambidextrous) while making most baitcasting reels with a right-hand retrieve?

*Wayne A. Bush
Roaring Spring, PA*

AUTHOR TODD KUHN REPLIES:

► Baitcasters evolved from the levelwinds of yesteryear, which paid out line with the

flip of a bar. These early reels were designed with the handle on the right because cranking was the most important feature of a reel that didn't cast. As levelwinds evolved into baitcasters, manufacturers kept the same tooling and designs.

Spinning reels, on the other hand (pun intended), were created from scratch, so designers opted for left-hand cranking reels as the majority of fishermen were (and still are) right-handed and naturally cast right-handed. As spinning reels evolved, manufacturers eventually made the handles ambidextrous to accommodate lefties.

BIG SPENDERS

► This year's Tackle Test [March 2015] was a disappointment. I don't take issue with your always-thorough testing, but with the prices of the gear you selected to test. Out of 42 rods and reels, only five cost less than \$100. Even the "budget" items run \$160 to \$240. Of course a rod that costs more than my truck payment will perform well. Try testing gear that real readers can afford.

*Josh DeHoux
Garnett, KS*

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Taking the Bait

MY LIFE AS A WORM MERCHANT WAS SHORT-LIVED—AND PUTRID

Call it a confluence of accident and purpose. I was a cross-country runner in college and spent most autumn weekends racing on golf courses around the Midwest. I was a fisherman, always scrounging for bait. I was a biology student. And I was desperately poor.

A sidetracked lecture in a biology class introduced me to the topic of worm charming. Sometimes called “worm grunting,” the idea is that if you can deliver the right tone and cadence of vibrations into the soil, earthworms will think predatory moles are on their tails and wriggle right to the surface, where you can scoop them up by the handful.

I was enchanted by this idea, and since I spent so much time on golf courses—bona fide nightcrawler heaven—I figured I could test this before and after races. I found a metal rod, wrapped it with audio wire, and connected it to a friend's boom box.

I'd like to tell you I was overrun by a tide of sonically bewitched worms. The truth is that charming seemed to work—a

little bit. I scooped up a dozen or so fat worms in an hour of grunting—only slightly more than I might have collected with a spade. But like most enterprises, worm grunting rewarded persistence, and after several sessions, I found myself tending hundreds of nightcrawlers in my college dorm room.

I persuaded the few other anglers in my school to buy them from me. I caught fish on some of my worms, deeply satisfied that I didn't have to buy bait. I'd like to think that a do-it-yourself (and cheapskate) ethic is what got most of the “bait masters” whom we profile in this issue (“The Bait Bosses,” p. 36) started in the business. But while theirs thrived, my own business withered. Dried up, you might say.

The problem with keeping so many worms in a college dorm raised its sightless head a week or so into my career. The first worms died, and I spent more time picking out their gummy carcasses than I did charming fresh ones.

Then the conference cross-country meet arrived the same week as mid-term exams. I just didn't have time to tend my flock, and one evening I opened my dorm room door to the stench of rotting invertebrates. I lifted the lid on my little worm farm, and it was worse than I expected. Dozens of dried squiglets surrounded the container, but the ones that were entombed in the damp soil were even more horrible. They stank worse than my roommate's socks. As I flushed them down the toilet, I also flushed my dreams of making a fortune in the nightcrawler trade.

Andrew McKean

ANDREW MCKEAN, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
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THE LIFE
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THE FISH COLLECTOR

A PASSION FOR ANGLING—AND A KNACK FOR LANDING UNUSUAL FISH—HAS SPARKED 15-YEAR-OLD JOE HAGENGRUBER'S QUEST TO CATCH ALL 87 SPECIES OF FISH IN HIS HOME STATE OF MONTANA **BY NATALIE KREBS**

Hagengruber shows off a rainbow trout.



OUTDOOR LIFE: Where did the idea for this project come from?

JOE HAGENGRUBER: I went icefishing with my family when I was seven. Everyone was catching the usual perch and trout. Then I started catching odd fish that no one else was hooking, like suckers, walleyes, and lake whitefish. So I decided maybe I should catch a lot more.

OL: Tell us about your latest species.

JH: I caught a slimy sculpin last summer. It's about 2 to 3 inches and it lives in fast, cold water, and tends to stay under the rocks. I was fishing for trout but I saw a couple of sculpin swimming around and I was using a pretty small hook, so I decided to try to catch one. And I did.

OL: Is there a fish you've been trying to catch that has so far eluded you?

JH: We've fished a bunch of places that have about 10 different types of minnows. I can land those, but I can't seem to catch a fathead minnow. They're even in the creek behind my house, which is a little embarrassing.

OL: Any special rules for your goal?

JH: The only rule is that I have to catch them on hook and line. I can't use a minnow trap or anything like that, although I did build one of those for fun in the creek in my backyard.

OL: What will you do once you've caught every species?

JH: I'm going to travel back to the places I like best and start over. My favorite spot is probably in central Montana, where there's a sort of irrigation ditch the size of a swimming pool right along this big pasture and a huge mountain range. It holds eight or nine different species of minnows. It's a great fishing hole.

OL: Is fishing purely a hobby, or do you hope to turn it into a career?

JH: I'd really love to get a job working with fish. Biology is the most likely path, because I love handling the fish. I've been out a few times with my dad's friends, who are biologists. They'll set up big nets and catch walleyes and trout to study. I'm going to start volunteering with them.

THE SCOREBOARD Number species caught so far: 49 • First species ever landed: *Rainbow trout* • Biggest species: *Paddlefish* (60 pounds) • Smallest species: *Stickleback* (1.5 inches) • Favorite fish to eat: *Deep-fried perch*



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KUNG FU TURKEY MASTER

ONE MORNING IN THE WOODS LEADS TO A LIFETIME OF LESSONS BY EDDIE H. LAREW

Sleep was out of the question. It was the night before the first turkey hunt of the season, and I was 10 years old and restless. So instead of fighting it, I donned my surplus army camo and drifted downstairs to wait it out in the TV room. The choices on the tube were white static or a kung fu flick.

A whirlwind of ninjas surrounded Jet Li. He couldn't possibly keep his eyes on all of his adversaries at once. So, in a brief lull between nunchuk blows, he blindfolded himself. Now his other senses came alive. He could hear—maybe even feel—danger. No enemy survived.

Dad jerked me out of my television trance when he asked if I had my shotgun and shells. Normally Dad took me hunting, but this morning he dropped me off at his friend Fred's house. It was well before dawn, and I was instructed to listen keenly and do anything Fred said. He was a turkey master.

When Fred opened his door, it looked as though he'd slept in his camo and face paint. I wasn't surprised. Turkey season lasts but a month—what master has time for laundry? His beard was ragged, his eyes were wedged to tomatoes, his cap was hammered flat. He grabbed his Winchester pump and didn't bother locking the door behind him.

After a stop for coffee and cigarettes, plus a sticky bun for me, we slid into the woods and found an oak tree. Fred pointed to the ground, and I sat. He landed beside me and unsheathed his legendary Moss Double Tone box call, setting it near his knee.

The sun began to rise. I still remember the colors, the sounds, the smells of that breezy April morning. An owl practically lifted my hat. Mosquitos buzzed and a woodpecker bent his beak on breakfast. As more animals chimed in, however, the medley became muddled to my untrained ears.

Then, a few minutes after daylight, I heard something altogether different. It was faint but bold. By gosh, it had to be a gobble!

I nudged Fred, and he looked back with a raised eyebrow.

"Think I hear one," I whispered.

"If you can hear it, let's call it in," he said.

I waited, and at last heard it again: definitely a gobble. Fred picked up his call and struck five of the most delightful notes I'd ever heard. He rested the call. I readied myself.

An hour later, I was still ready, but growing stiff. Nothing had happened.

With the sun in the sky now, I could just make out a grassy field beyond the woods. Suddenly a bird fluttered into the opening.

"Fred," I whispered. Fred didn't reply.

**"THE SOUND WAS
FAINT BUT BOLD. BY
GOSH, IT HAD TO BE
A GOBBLE!"**

"Fred!" He turned. "I think I see one."

"If you can see one," he growled, "shoot it in the face."

Then Fred did the most amazing thing: He closed his eyes. I knew he was focusing all his concentration, trying to pinpoint even the slightest sound. He was listening—maybe even feeling—for a turkey.

An impossibly long time later—both for mortals and 10-year-olds—Fred opened his eyes and collected the box call.

"If there are no turkeys, go home," he said.

So we did. Later, when Dad returned from work, I told him I'd learned much about patience and concentration. Ten years later, I found myself retelling the story over Thanksgiving, and describing how I'd used those virtues the following spring to bag my first gobble.

Dad laughed. "You do know, son, that was right around the time Fred's wife passed. He'd taken to the Wild Turkey pretty hard."

And then it dawned on me: Fred the kung fu turkey master had been asleep.



ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL BYERS

ONLY YOU CAN PREVENT WILDFIRES.



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GEAR



FIELD TEST

BUDGET CAMS

+ NEW FEATURE-PACKED TRAIL CAMERAS NO LONGER REQUIRE A BANK LOAN TO BUY

BY TONY HANSEN

Trail cameras have become such a ubiquitous piece of hunting gear that it's difficult to remember what life was like before them. They're incredibly useful tools that continue to improve in quality while declining in price. We tested six cameras that sell for less than \$300—some far below that mark—and found each unit to be a solid option.

However, a couple of them would be stand-outs at any price.

HOW WE TEST ★

Our evaluation took place in southern Michigan late last winter. Daytime temperatures never topped 14 degrees, and overnight readings were well below zero.

The cameras were positioned over a food plot that had been baited in compliance with state recreational feeding laws. Secured to a double-trunked tree, each unit was placed in a nearly identical location to ensure accurate results for judging flash range, trigger speed, and overall image quality.

Cameras were set to record images at the highest available resolution, with a single image recorded per activation and a 20-second delay (except for the Moultrie unit, which was set to fire after a 30-second delay; its only other sub-minute options were 5 and 10 seconds). Image quality was judged by enlarging each image to examine fine detail.

A marker stake was set at 45 feet to evaluate flash range. A Day 6 Outdoors PlotWatcher Pro time-lapse unit (\$229; day6outdoors.com) was used to confirm all game activity and evaluate trigger speeds.



BROWNING RECON FORCE HD

\$160; BROWNINGTRAILCAMERAS.COM

OUTDOOR LIFE
EDITOR'S
CHOICE



COMANCHE KODIAK SERIES

\$260; KODIAKCAMERA.COM



BUSHNELL TROPHY CAM HD 8MP

\$230; BUSHNELL.COM

If you're into video, this is the cam for you. The redesigned Recon Force offers full 1,080p HD video—a trail-camera-industry first. And with a max setting of 10 megapixels, the photo quality isn't too shabby either. Daytime images were excellent, and nighttime shots captured activity beyond the 45-foot marker (see "How We Test," at left).

The Recon Force was also one of the simplest cameras to deploy: Turn it on and it's ready to capture images. Setting the date/time stamp, choosing modes, setting delays—it was all very straightforward.

As you'd expect, the video captured at 1,920x1,080 resolution was rich and vivid on my retina-display Mac Book.

The trigger speed was very good. The unit took roughly 1,000 images in one 24-hour period and didn't seem to miss any opportunity to capture game. This is an excellent camera and just an incredible bargain.

Featuring a built-in Wi-Fi modem, the Kodiak allows for the remote transfer of images without the need for a SIM card or data plan.

That feature alone makes the Kodiak one of the most innovative cameras of 2015, and makes it an excellent value despite its being the most expensive cam in our test. The Kodiak captures still images with a max resolution of 12 megapixels. Daytime images were outstanding, with good color and clarity. Nighttime images and flash range were on par with the top units.

The camera boasts 1,280x720 HD video with audio, multi-shot capabilities, and an SD-card cycle option. The Wi-Fi system works with a free app for iOS and Android. Get to within Wi-Fi range of the camera (50 feet with my iPhone 6; Comanche says the range will be "hundreds of feet" once the kinks are worked out) and you can view and download images.

This latest unit in the Bushnell Trophy Cam HD line is arguably the best Trophy Cam yet.

Technically, this is a 2014 model, but it remains available in 2015. It offers an insanely fast trigger speed of 0.2 seconds, along with recovery times of less than a second. Combine that with a revamped passive infrared (PIR) sensor that improves the unit's coverage area, and you have a camera that recorded a staggering 1,804 images in a 24-hour period—all but five of which included game.

The list of features is long and varied: 720p HD video, a redesigned latch system, a time-lapse capture mode, and a super-long battery life are among the most notable. The daytime image quality was very good, though the 8-megapixel max image resolution couldn't compete with others' in the test. Nighttime images were just average.

An exposed wire when the unit is opened causes some durability concerns.

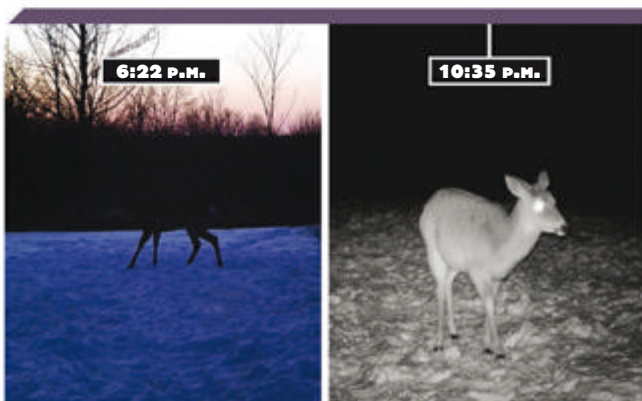


MINOX DTC 400 SLIM

\$249; MINOX.COM

The German company Minox has earned a reputation as a maker of high-quality, reasonably priced sporting optics. Their first foray in the trail-cam game is the DTC 400 SLIM.

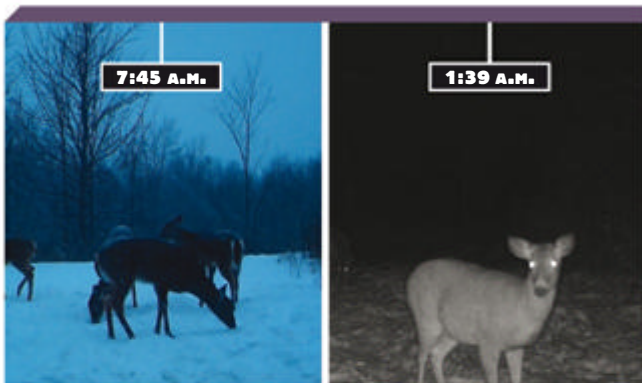
As you might infer, the unit separates itself from the pack with its physical dimensions—it measures just over an inch in thickness, and the back of the unit is concave to fit snugly against a tree trunk. The unit maxes out at 8 megapixels and captures 720p video. Its trigger speed was decent but not great. The unit can be set to take nine photos per burst. Daytime image quality was good; however, nighttime images were grainy, and the flash range was among the weakest in the test.



WILDCRASH INNOVATIONS CRUSH ILLUSION 6

\$99; WILDCRASHINNOVATIONS.COM

Given its low price and just-6-megapixel camera, I was expecting this unit to be a clunker; but it held its own. Its advertised one-second trigger speed seemed to hold true. Images were captured as deer began to enter the frame and continued as expected with the delay set to 20 seconds. The daytime image quality was solid, and after-dark images were acceptable as well. The flash range was very good. The overall build quality is improved, but the short bungee cords that ship with the unit are useless for mounting on any tree trunk thicker than your lower leg.



MOULTRIE M-990i GEN 2

\$200; MOULTRIEFEEDERS.COM

Recording the fewest number of photos of all units in the test, the M-990i Gen 2 tallied just 57 images over a 24-hour period—nearly 1,300 fewer than the Bushnell. To be fair, the camera was set to delay 30 seconds between images, while most others were set to 20 seconds, but that alone doesn't explain the performance.

The M-990i's trigger speed was sap-slow, failing to photograph deer until they had been in front of the camera for nearly a minute. It also went for long periods (10 to 20 minutes) with deer feeding in front of it without triggering. Solid features include multi-shot settings, 1,280p video with sound, and good battery life.

TEST RESULTS

SCORES AND PRICES, AT A GLANCE

TRAILS CAMS	PRICE	IMAGE QUALITY	VIDEO QUALITY	TRIGGER SPEED	FLASH RANGE	EASE OF USE	DURABILITY	WEATHER-PROOFNESS	FEATURE SET	BATTERY LIFE	VALUE	OVER-ALL
BROWNING <small>EDITOR'S CHOICE</small>	\$160	9	10	8	8	9	9	9	9	10	10	91
COMANCHE KODIAK	\$260	8	8	8	8	8	9	9	10	9	10	87
BUSHNELL	\$230	7	8	10	9	9	8	9	9	10	8	86
MINOX	\$249	7	8	7	7	9	9	9	8	8	7	79
WILDCRASH INNOVATIONS	\$99	7	7	7	7	8	7	8	9	8	9	77
MOULTRIE	\$200	8	8	3	9	6	8	9	8	7	6	72



REST ASSURED

FIVE SLEEPING BAGS THAT PUT COMFORT AND A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP ABOVE ALL ELSE
BY BRANDON BUTLER

Mummy-style sleeping bags that pack down to the size of a cantaloupe and whose weight is measured in ounces rather than pounds certainly have their merits. But sometimes you just want to crawl into a spacious, comfortable rectangle bag, size and weight be damned. These three-season bags fit the bill.

1. BUTLER BAGS MILD CLIMATE SLEEPING BAG

RATING: 32° F; \$275; BUTLERBAGS.COM

► Made in the U.S. by backcountry aficionados (unrelated to the author), Butler Bags are built to last. Of the bags we tested, this is the one best suited to being rolled out on the bare ground, thanks to its tough marine-grade canvas exterior and bombproof dual-control brass zipper. At 84 by 41 inches, this bag has room to move, and the flannel lining is soft and pleasant. It comes with a flannel pillow and a canvas storage sack, and the flannel-lined flap can be pulled down over your head for additional warmth. It tips the scales at 11 pounds and will take up half your truck bed, but its toughness and comfort more than make up for its bulk.



HOW WE TEST

We selected bags rated for three-season use (+20° F) that measure at least 34 inches across. We set up a tent in a backyard in northern Missouri in early June and slept in each bag atop a Coleman Packaway Cot. We evaluated the comfort, roominess, and ease of climbing in and out of each. The bags were also graded on the quality and durability of materials and construction; how well they pack up; any bonus features; and value.

2. SLUMBERJACK COUNTRY SQUIRE 20

RATING: 20° F; \$240; SJKGEAR.COM

► At 84 inches long by 42 inches wide, the Country Squire is the largest sleeping bag in the test—you'll appreciate its ample space as soon as you crawl inside. Both the top and the bottom are stuffed with synthetic insulation that offers substantial padding. The 12-ounce cotton-duck exterior is strong and durable; this is a bag you can sleep comfortably in on the ground. It comes with a handled duffel bag that's big enough to also carry clothes, a pillow, or a blanket. The bag's cotton liner can be easily removed and washed to keep the interior clean. The heavy-duty zipper rolls along without snagging.



3. CABELA'S MOUNTAIN TRAPPER 20

RATING: 20°F; \$140; CABELAS.COM

► The Mountain Trapper is a great bag to take to the mountains—as long as you're driving. It weighs nearly 9 pounds, but with the weight come many benefits. At 36 inches wide and 84 inches long, it's plenty roomy; its rugged, cotton-canvas shell is water-resistant; the heavy cotton-flannel interior is super soft; and the 3-plus pounds of poly insulation ensures warmth. The large YKK zipper is easy to pull, and a guard keeps the fabric from bunching or snagging. The bag rolls up into an attached flap, then cinches down with three 2-inch nylon straps.

4. L.L. BEAN DOWN SLEEPING BAG

RATING: 20°F; \$260; LLBEAN.COM

► Stuffed with premium 650-fill water-repellent down, this bag is very warm and lightweight. There's ample down on the top and sides for warmth where you need it, but the underside is so thin you'll have to sleep on a pad or mattress for a good night's rest. The water-resistant ripstop nylon exterior has a soft feel and withstands punctures by the down. At only 2 pounds 15 ounces, it's far and away the lightest bag in our test, and it compresses to the size of a basketball. When pulled quickly, the zipper will grab fabric, so take care when settling in for the night.



5. NEMO MEZZO LOFT 30

RATING: 30°F; \$230; NEMOEQUIPMENT.COM

► The Mezzo Loft 30 is the most technical bag in our test and represents the best blend of size, weight, and comfort. At 36 inches wide, it offers ample shoulder room, and at just 4 pounds 4 ounces, it's reasonably light. This is due in part to a lack of padding on the underside; instead, it has a sewn-in sleeve that accepts a sleeping pad, sold separately. Since we tested the bags on a cot, we didn't use the pad, but it should be considered mandatory for sleeping on the ground. The hood across the top adds warmth and can also work as a pillow. Two Mezzo Lofts can be zipped together to form a double bag.



TEST RESULTS SCORES, SPECS, AND PRICES, AT A GLANCE

SLEEPING BAGS	PRICE	WEIGHT	DIMENSIONS	COMFORT: LINING	COMFORT: ROOMINESS	COMFORT: FILL	DURABILITY: EXTERIOR	DURABILITY: STITCHING	EASE OF IN/OUT	ZIPPER QUALITY	PACKABILITY	FEATURES	VALUE	OVERALL
BUTLER <small>PRICED TO MOVE</small>	\$275	11 lb.	84" X 41"	10	10	9	10	10	10	10	7	9	8	93
SLUMBERJACK	\$240	10.6 lb.	84" X 42"	10	10	10	9	9	10	9	7	8	9	91
CABELA'S <small>GREAT BUY</small>	\$140	8.8 lb.	84" X 36"	10	9	9	9	8	8	9	8	8	10	88
L.L. BEAN	\$260	2.9 lb.	76" X 34"	9	7	8	7	9	8	8	10	7	8	81
NEMO	\$230	4.25 lb.	78" X 36"	9	8	8	8	8	8	8	9	8	7	81

FLAMELESS COOKING

LEAVE YOUR STOVE AT HOME. THESE NEW PORTABLE COOKING SYSTEMS RELY ON CHEMISTRY INSTEAD OF COMBUSTION **BY ANDREW MCKEAN**

🕒 Last fall, while bowhunting elk miles from the nearest road, I ate like a king without ever striking a match. Instead of my bulky stove and cooking pots, I used a new flameless cooking pouch made by MealSpec (meal-spec.com), and enjoyed hot, nutritious food twice a day.

The MealSpec pouch is one of a number of new portable cooking products that uses the reaction of chemicals to heat water that then cooks food. I also tested products from MagicCook and Barocook, comparing their portability, ease of use, field utility, and intensity and duration of heat. The latter two products (see inset below) are virtually identical—both use chemical pouches in conjunction with supplied cooking vessels, which makes them easy to use but limits their portability and capacity.

The MealSpec product has a wider application in survival, military, and backcountry situations, or for anyone who needs lightweight and compact cooking gear that deploys quickly and relatively cleanly.

THE SCIENCE

These flameless cooking products function like chemical hand warmers. Those packs use iron filings as their fuel and a salt compound as their catalyst. When exposed to humid air, the salt compound rusts the iron, producing heat as a byproduct of the exothermic oxidation.

The fuel in MealSpec pouches is aluminum powder, which reacts with calcium oxide when water is introduced and produces a more intense heat. In the case of the MealSpec, the heat is contained in a vented, zip-top bag that allows steam to escape but retains the hot water. I managed to get the temperature of the water in my bags up to 215 degrees on average, and they maintained at least 170 degrees for nearly an hour. That's enough heat to sterilize water, hard-boil an egg, or warm up any prepared food that fits in the 11-by-13-inch bag.



THE UTILITY

I used the MealSpec bag mainly to heat up dehydrated foods. I mixed cold water with the dried food, then sealed the food bag and placed it in the MealSpec bag. Then I added water (precisely 6 ounces) to the outer bag, zipped it up, and waited 20 to 25 minutes for my food to warm up.

According to MealSpec founder and CEO Dave Huselton, the military is looking at this single-use pouch to replace the standard MRE (Meal Ready to Eat) because of its portability and reliability, and for its ability to cook a variety of foods. "You can poach an egg, cook a raw chicken breast, or cook the fish you just caught," notes Huselton. "That means you don't have to carry your food. You can cook whatever you find or catch."



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To get better accuracy while shooting with a bipod, make sure your shoulders are perpendicular to the rifle's stock and barrel.

TIP



BIPOD TEST

TAKE TWO

+

The measure of a good bipod goes beyond how well it props up a rifle. The premium units we tested were judged based on how they handled moving targets, how they adapted to uneven ground, the effort needed to deploy them, their strength and utility shooting off barricades, and numerous other factors.

BY JOHN B. SNOW

HOW THEY STACKED UP

**ATLAS PSR BT46-LW17**

PRICE: \$320 • WEIGHT: 13.2 OZ.

Although its moniker is clunky, this bipod is anything but. The Atlas is an outstanding piece of engineering, as reflected by its ergonomics, strength, and elegant design.

This is one of the easiest bipods to deploy and adjust on the market. The legs can be placed in any of five positions across a 180-degree arc of movement and can be extended or retracted with one hand. The legs also stay firmly in place once positioned—they won't inadvertently collapse or extend.

The knurling on the legs makes for a great handhold, should the shooter wish to employ a single leg as a vertical grip.

Perhaps the cleverest design element on this bipod is its central control wheel, which is placed unobtrusively between the legs. It adjusts with one hand and controls the tension for how the bipod both cants and pivots.

Its pivoting action gives the Atlas a wide range of motion for fast target transitions and for moving targets.

Another selling point is the bipod's weight. At 13.2 ounces, it is one of the lightest in the test. The way the legs stow neatly under the rifle means they won't impede its maneuverability. The Atlas handles every task well yet costs less than many others in the field. At \$320, it is a good value for a shooter looking for a high-performance bipod. Given the degree of excellence it represents, it is little wonder the Atlas took our Editor's Choice honors.

**SIERRA 7**

PRICE: \$390 • WEIGHT: 1 LB. 13.2 OZ.

The Sierra 7 bipod is a serious tool. Yes, it is bulky, and, yes, there is definitely a learning curve that needs to be surmounted in order to run it the right way, but the payoff once you master it is well worth the effort.

The S7, as it is also known, was designed in part by Daniel Horner, who is, without exaggeration, the best shooter in the world. Among its features are two levers: one controls how easily the rifle cants, the other adjusts the resistance in the head of the bipod for pivoting. It takes time to tune the bipod and get these levers positioned that way you want—and even mounting a gun on the bipod requires some tweaking—but once this is done, the S7 offers an unprecedented amount of control. When it comes to engaging moving targets, this bipod is in a class of its own.

The legs are very strong and set far apart to create a solid shooting platform. If there's a flaw with the S7, it's that deploying the legs is a bit of a chore, requiring more time and effort than is ideal. The claw-style feet on the legs are very aggressive and grip (and mar) any surface with great enthusiasm.

If the weight and price don't put you off, and if you want the most sophisticated bipod out there, the Sierra 7 is the one for you.

**APO LRA**

PRICE: \$425 • WEIGHT: 1 LB. 8 OZ.

The pivots on the legs of this beefy bipod are located high on either side of its frame, placing them closer to the axis of the bore as compared to bipods that sit underneath the stock. This gives the LRA a stable platform that handles recoil extraordinarily well. It is about the closest you'll get to shooting off an actual benchrest.

Each leg can move through a 90-degree arc, with four positions to choose from. They also extend in small increments from 8 ½ to 11 ¾ inches in length. Additionally, the bipod has a lever that, when loosened, allows the rifle to cant from one side to the other. Taken together, all this adjustability helps the bipod adapt to nearly any type of uneven terrain.

The throw lever on the side of the bipod makes attaching the unit to a rail easy. And its craftsmanship is top-notch.

Where the bipod comes up short is with movers and transitioning quickly between targets. The broad base created by the legs is rock-solid, but the lack of any type of pivot in the system makes the rifle difficult to traverse.

The LRA is one of the pricier bipods we tested. Even though it delivers a lot of performance, \$425 is a lot to shell out.



ELITE IRON REVOLUTION

PRICE: \$625 • WEIGHT: 1 LB. 12.8 OZ.

This bipod is sort of like an auto show concept car: It has some very cool and innovative features built into it, but there are a couple of serious flaws as well that will limit its appeal. The first issue is the price. At \$625, it is simply too expensive for most shooters to justify, especially in light of the quality one can find in other bipods that cost much less.

Second, due to its design, there are a limited number of guns on which it will easily fit. The collar that holds the legs rotates 360 degrees around the barrel, so it requires a firearm with a slender forend and rail attachment in order to be used.

But the bipod is built like a tank and can be positioned effectively on any type of terrain. The legs are easy to deploy and stow away neatly, despite their considerable length.

Since you can position the legs above the barrel, the Revolution manages recoil extraordinarily well.

The only thing we didn't like was that the legs extend too easily, sometimes ratcheting to a longer position when we didn't want them to. This is something that could be addressed with future iterations of the unit. And if the makers of the bipod could get the price down a couple hundred dollars as well, I think shooters would flock to it.



ALLIED PRECISION ARMS DMS

PRICE: \$160 • WEIGHT: 11.2 OZ.

This unit was one of the biggest surprises of the test. Despite having fixed-length 8-inch legs, the DMS is able to adapt to an impressive variety of terrain, thanks to the 180 degrees of independent adjustment in the legs. Likewise, its light weight—just 11.2 ounces—didn't compromise its ruggedness and strength in any way. We were able to put our full weight behind the rifle with one bipod leg braced against barricades without issue.

The 180 degrees of leg mobility makes this bipod easy to stow, and because it doesn't weigh much, it does not upset the balance of the rifle when shooting off-hand the way a bulkier bipod will.

The only category where the DMS didn't excel was recoil management. When the legs are deployed in any position other than at 90 degrees, the amount of spring in the bipod causes the rifle to bounce noticeably under recoil.

The shooter also needs to be careful not to get any lubricant on the tension-adjustment wheel. Any oil in there will reduce the friction needed to keep the rifle upright, causing it to flop to the side.

At \$160, this was the best value in the test. This U.S.-made bipod is very durable and able to accommodate a wide range of shooting scenarios with ease.



SINCLAIR TACTICAL

PRICE: \$230 • WEIGHT: 1 LB. 10.2 OZ.

This bipod from Sinclair has been around for several years now, and I've used one on any number of rifles since it was introduced. Unique among the bipods in the test is the way its legs can be positioned at different widths. This gives the shooter a lot of flexibility to get his rifle at different heights and to adapt to different shooting surfaces.

The bipod deploys and stows easily, and another nice feature is that the legs are easy to remove from the frame should the shooter wish to unencumber his rifle. The downside here is that the legs come off so easily that you run the risk of having it happen at an inopportune time.

The Sinclair is also pretty fussy. It requires regular maintenance to keep it free of dirt and needs to be well-lubricated to run smoothly. Also, the fasteners on the legs will invariably work loose and need to be retightened. Despite its name, it is the least "tactical" bipod in the test.

These issues aside, it does an excellent job with every type of shooting chore. It handles recoil well, is a pleasure to shoot from while prone, and adjusts easily. If you like to mess with your gear and are willing to take care of this bipod, it will take care of you. If you want to just throw a bipod on your rifle and forget about it, the Sinclair probably isn't the way to go.



HARRIS HBRS

PRICE: \$132 • WEIGHT: 13.2 OZ.

The Harris HBRS is the benchmark for what constitutes a quality bipod. Hunters and shooters around the world have used them for decades. You can spend less on a bipod, but you shouldn't. The S-series swivels, so the rifle can be canted to either side, allowing the bipod to adapt to uneven ground.

The design is simple, strong, and proven. The legs snap into place quickly and can be extended with one hand by pushing on a tab. Deploying a single leg

to brace against a barricade is easy to do, and a shooter can put his full weight into the rifle and not harm the bipod.

Because the Harris doesn't pivot, it doesn't handle movers as smoothly as some others, though there are aftermarket parts that can be added to give it this ability. (Likewise, adding an aftermarket throw lever to the wheel that controls the tension for the canting is a smart move.)

The Harris does everything a bipod is supposed to do, and does it well. It manages recoil nicely, works excellently from prone, is very easy to use, doesn't weigh much, and is built to take a lot of abuse.



VERSA POD

PRICE: \$380 • WEIGHT: 1 LB. 7.6 OZ.

The Versa Pod system is, on the one hand, exciting and admirable for the amount of thought and clever features it incorporates, yet it's disappointing for its shortcomings, which we found impossible to overlook.

The good news first. It lives up to its name, given how versatile its mounting hardware is. You can put it on pretty much any rifle with a rail or swivel stud. The kit also comes with three pairs of feet—big claws, flat pads, and rubber ends—that are a cinch

to swap out. Also, by purchasing bases for all different rifles, you can easily move the bipod from one firearm to the next.

It performs well, too. The head swivels for movers, tracking them nicely, and the bipod does a great job with prone shooting.

The Versa Pod lost points on durability. Following our torture test, the frame showed significant galling and wear. It also had problems when we shot from barricades because of how loose and floppy the legs are. The Versa Pod doesn't have the ability to cant much nor was it able to adapt to uneven ground as well as other bipods in the test.

HOW THEY STACKED UP

BIPOD TEST, AT A GLANCE

	Make	Price	Weight	Adjust	Strength	Recoil	Ease of Use	Prone	Movers	Barricade	Versatility	Craftsmanship	Value	TOTAL
WINNER BEST CHOICE	ATLAS PSR BT46-LW17	\$320	13.2 oz.	9	9	8	10	9	9	9.5	9.5	9.5	9	91.5
	SIERRA 7	\$390	1 lb. 13.2 oz.	9.5	9	10	7	9.5	10	9	9.5	9	8	90.5
	APO LRA	\$425	1 lb. 8 oz.	9	8.75	10	9	10	7.5	9	8.5	9	8	88.75
WINNER BEST BUY	ELITE IRON REVOLUTION	\$625	1 lb. 12.8 oz.	7.25	10	9.75	9	9.5	7.75	8.5	8.25	10	6	86
	ALLIED PRECISION ARMS	\$160	11.2 oz.	8.25	8.5	7.5	9.5	8.5	8.5	8.5	9	7.5	9.5	85.25
	SINCLAIR TACTICAL	\$230	1 lb. 10.2 oz.	9	8.25	8	8.5	9	8.5	7.5	8.5	8	7.5	82.75
	HARRIS HBRS	\$132	13.2 oz.	8.5	8	8	9	8.5	7	7.5	8.5	8.5	8.75	82.25
	VERSA POD	\$380	1 lb. 7.6 oz.	6.5	7	8	8.5	8	8.5	6	9	6	8.25	75.75



DID YOU KNOW

The original designation of the M1 Garand is U.S. rifle, caliber .30, M1. Later it was called Rifle, caliber .30, M1.

GUN SLINGERS

TWO SLINGS THAT WILL
IMPROVE YOUR SHOOTING
BY JOHN B. SNOW

First, let's clarify something: If that thing hanging off your rifle doesn't help you shoot better, it isn't a sling—it's a carrying strap. Slings aid marksmanship by bracing and supporting the rifle; straps just help you lug the rifle around.

The classic shooting sling is the M1907, which was the standard-issue sling that adorned M1903 Springfields, M1917 Enfields, and

M1 Garands during the two World Wars. It works by creating a tight loop around the upper part of the shooter's support arm, pulling the buttstock into the shoulder, and dampening movement of the sights.

Countless sling designs have appeared since then. These two new models incorporate smart refinements that allow them to be deployed quickly during dynamic hunting and shooting situations.

RIFLES ONLY FTW SLING



A heavy-duty bungee cord is sewn into the back half of this sling. Because it absorbs shock as the shooter moves with the rifle, it helps reduce fatigue over the course of a day. Also, when the shooter goes into a "hasty" posi-

tion—usually while shooting off-hand or while kneeling—the bungee sucks the stock tight to the shooter, making it both stable and fast.

In addition, there's a forward loop the shooter can use if there's time to "sling

up." This loop system solves a problem that exists with nearly every other type of shooting sling out there—namely, that no matter how tight you make the loop, it eventually slides down your biceps, compromising

the shooting position. The locking tab, once tightened, keeps the sling in place.

This sling is tremendously versatile. I use it on my heavy precision rifles, my hunting rigs, and my AR-type carbines. (\$130; riflesonly.com)

PEABODY SLING



This one is a refined version of the Ching sling. Like the Ching sling, the Peabody has a strap that forks, forming a Y. The shooter's lead elbow drops down into the fork of the Y as the rifle is brought up, and by pulling his arm

toward his body, the shooter secures the stock in the pocket of his shoulder.

I hunted with this sling extensively last fall and was very satisfied with how it worked. It is nice and light, and it doesn't get in the way

like bulkier slings are apt to do. It is also intuitive to use and fast to deploy.

The only problem I had was with the screws that secure the base of the sling to the rear swivel. They worked loose during a

backcountry hunt in Alaska, and I had to thread the sling back together with a leather thong. Had I known this would happen, I would have used some Loctite to keep the screws in place. (\$90; barrantileather.com)



WINCHESTER SXP BLACK SHADOW

A SPEEDY 20-GAUGE PUMP GUN **BY JOHN B. SNOW**

The new Winchester SXP is a fine little bird gun. It's chambered in 20-gauge and is a scaled-down version of the pump-action SXP 12-gauges that Winchester has had in its lineup for a while now.

The SXP's claim to fame is the speed of its action. The shotgun's slide moves briskly back and forth, ejecting spent shells and feeding fresh rounds into the chamber in the blink of an eye.

Is it truly the fastest pump-action out there? I couldn't tell you that's the case for certain, but I can say that it is no slower than other pump-actions.

During my evaluation, I worked the SXP on doubles and triples at my local gun club, and it tracked very well when moving from one target to another, even on tough crossers and other challenging presentations.

Part of this can be attributed to the smooth cycling action, but there's more to it than that. The SXP has a slightly muzzle-forward balance that makes it handle nicely. I was pretty surprised by this, because the sample I had came with 26-inch barrels, and, generally, I prefer 28-inch barrels on pumps and semi-autos. For me, 26-inch barrels can be a little whippy, which is fine in a grouse thicket, but for birds in open country, I like a gun that has more "swing" built into it.

Upon closer inspection, I saw that the barrel on the SXP steps up in size to a noticeably wider diameter near the muzzle, placing more weight at the end of the shotgun, which certainly aided its swing.

Idiot-Proof

The SXP is definitely a guy's shotgun. I say that because of its simplicity to operate and maintain. This is a gun that doesn't require an owner's manual. Unscrew the cap on the magazine tube and tap out the single pin that holds the trigger assembly in place and you can pull everything apart that you'll need to mess with.

One thing I appreciate in the gun's build is how the bolt carrier clips on to the plate at the rear of the action bars. This keeps the bolt carrier from inadvertently falling to the ground during disassembly. By depressing the rear of the firing pin, you can remove the carrier from the plate and clean the bolt, firing pin, and the rest of the bolt-carrier group. It's an idiot-proof design.

Smart and Simple

The simplicity of the design is echoed in the SXP's aesthetics. Other than a couple of splashes of red lettering on the side of the receiver, the two small Ws inset into the sides of the grip, and some geometric designs worked into the stock, the SXP Black Shadow is pretty bare bones. (Though the SXP comes in a number of other models with flashier grades of finish and trim.) The finish is muted black from butt to muzzle, with the exception of the glossy black magazine tube.

This is a basic shotgun that covers all the basics. The rib is slightly elevated above the barrel and has a single brass bead at

PERFORMANCE					DESIGN				VALUE	TOTAL
Handling	Reliability	Accuracy	Meets Purpose	Versatility	Craftsmanship	Ergonomics	Durability	Aesthetics		
8	9	7	9	8	7	7	9	7	7	78



The tough finish on the metal and the rugged synthetic stock allow the SXP to withstand hard use.

its end, which is all any shotgun really needs. Shouldered, the gun gives a good view down the sighting plane with no unnecessary distractions.

It comes with three flush-mounted screw-in choke tubes: Full, Modified, and Improved Cylinder. These allow the shooter to tune the shotgun to any bird-hunting scenario. It also has attachments for a sling. There's one mounting point molded into the buttstock and a swivel stud at the end of the magazine tube cap.

The SXP loads easily. The banana-shaped shell lifter moves out of the way with the slightest pressure as shells are inserted. The crossbolt safety at the rear of the trigger guard will be as familiar to hunters as a Lab in a duck blind.

Room to Improve

From an ergonomic standpoint, the gun would be better if the button that frees the action were located on the other side of the receiver. It could also really benefit from a better trigger. Mine broke at inconsistent weights with an average trigger pull of 9 pounds

STATS

Gauge	20
Capacity	4+1
Weight	6 lb. 8 oz.
Trigger Pull	9 lb. 4 oz.
Barrel Length	26 in.
Overall Length	46 1/2 in.
Price	\$399
Contact	winchesterguns.com

4 ounces. On an otherwise lively 6 1/2-pound shotgun, this is a bit of a black eye.

One could argue that for an entry-level-price shotgun—the SXP in 20-gauge lists for \$399—a good trigger pull is expecting too much. Five years ago, I might have agreed. But with the industry-wide improvement in triggers on entry-level rifles, I think we can, and should, expect the same from our shotguns.

Don't get me wrong, however. This concern aside, I think the SXP is a really good value and a capable bird gun. It's cheap, tough, and shoots nicely. Hard to beat that.

NOTABLE FEATURES



+

The butt pad on the SXP is Winchester's effective Inflex model. The internal ribs in the pad move the stock down and away from the shooter's cheek under recoil for better comfort. The hard heel on the pad makes for smooth, easy mounting.



+

The rotating bolt on the SXP has four lugs that lock into place in the receiver when the action is closed. This is a strong design, yet the lugs unlock quickly after the shot to help the shooter run the action and load the next shell in a speedy manner.

OL

SHOOT
PREDATORS

FALLING IN LOVE WITH THE .17 HORNET

HOW I DISCOVERED THE PERFECT PREDATOR ROUND **BY TYLER FREEL**

For several years now, I have been on a quest to find the ultimate predator rifle. I grew up calling coyotes in Colorado, but when I moved to Alaska, I found there was a gap in my arsenal that needed filling. My father and I usually make an annual trip to Afognak Island in late November or December, and the highlight for me is hunting the gorgeous foxes that roam the beaches. Shooting them presents a conundrum, however. The foxes there are big and tough, some weighing more than 20 pounds, but they still have very fragile skin. We used the .17

HMR and .22 WMR for several years, and although they are adequate, exceptional shot placement is required to avoid wounding and losing the fox. Cartridges like the .204 Rug., .17 Rem., and .223 Rem., on the other end of the spectrum, typically blow huge holes in the hides.

The relatively new .17 Hornet filled the void perfectly for me. Last fall, my dad brought his new Savage M25 to Afognak, and after taking a few foxes with it, I knew I had to have one.

SWEET SPOT

With the .17 HMR and .22 WMR,

even good hits rarely anchor foxes in their tracks. However, with the Hornet, nearly any solid body hit will drop them like they were hit by lightning. The saying "speed kills" certainly rings true with this cartridge. The .17 Hornet pushes a 20-grain V-Max north of 3,600 fps. Although most of my broadside shots pass through, the largest exit wounds were barely larger than a quarter. We cut open several of the foxes and saw that the vital organs were jellied. Overall, we took more than 30 foxes at ranges between 30 and 200 yards, and every solid hit

VARMINT RIG

The CZ-527 topped with a Leupold VX-III 4.5-14x40mm AO is a well-balanced and accurate combo for predators.



dropped them on the spot.

From what I've seen, the .17 Hornet is a fantastic all-around predator cartridge. In my Savage M25, group sizes average $\frac{5}{8}$ inch at 100 yards. With velocities rivaling the .22/250, it is a dead-on hold out to 300 yards. Not only does it put the lights out on foxes, it balances power and damage for even more fragile animals like lynxes and bobcats. It has proven to be a worthy coyote round as well.

LARGER PREY

I have taken a couple of coyotes with it here in Alaska, and was able to test it a little more extensively this winter calling coyotes in Colorado. I shot them at ranges between 40 and 175 yards. Although it requires a little more careful shot placement than a .204 or .223, the Hornet kills them just as dead. The larger coyotes I have shot generally spun around a few times, but they didn't go more than 10 yards. A few of the smaller dogs went down like a pile of bricks. The hide damage was even more minimal on coyotes, with most bullets not exiting. Of those that did, the largest exit hole was smaller than a quarter.

Although for a dedicated coyote caller, something larger might be more desirable, I think the .17 Hornet is as ideal an overall predator and fur rifle as they come.

RELOADING THE .17 HORNET

BY PAT MUNDY

Over the last few years, I've spent quite a bit of time at the reloading bench and in the field with the .17 Hornet, and I've have had a great time getting to know this fun little round.

My rifle, a CZ-527 Sporter, shoots very well. Hornady factory ammunition established a benchmark that was tough to improve on—groups in the .6- to .7-inch range with velocities of about 3,650 fps.

With careful experimentation, I was able to achieve slightly better accuracy, and to keep the velocity at or above 3,600 fps.

TOP POWDERS

The powder du jour for my rifle has been AA1680. I like this propellant because of its consistent metering and easy flow through a powder measure. It has also provided the most consistent results when throwing charges rather than weighing—a big deal when you're loading hundreds of rounds for a varmint shoot. Three other powders worthy of note are the Vihtavuori N120, Hodgdon 4198, and Reloader 7. Each of these has provided good accuracy and pretty fair velocity, and might be solid choices if you choose heavier bullets—particularly 25-grainers.

I've stuck primarily to 20-grain bullets, and in my rifle, both the Nosler Varmageddon Tipped and the Hornady V-Max provide the pinpoint accuracy and rapid expansion I want for varmints. I've also tested Berger and Hornady hollowpoints, and while they have shot well, I haven't taken them into the field yet.

One consideration with tipped bullets is overall length of the round and feeding from the magazine. My rifle requires an OAL of about 1.720 inches to feed properly, and for this reason, I use a combination of a Redding full-length sizer (adjusted to partially full-



length-size cases for easy feeding) and a Hornady seater. This allows for the correct seating depth and delivers exceptional accuracy.

PRIMER CHOICE

The only real surprise I have found with this caliber is with the primers. Initially, I bought into the idea of mild primers being best for such small charges of powder. As I experimented, however, I found that hotter primers such as the CCI BR-4, Federal 205, and Remington 7.5BR shot better and provided more consistent internal ballistics.

The .17 Hornet has a lot going for it. It's economical, accurate, flat shooting, fairly quiet, and, with proper bullet placement, it will handle anything from ground squirrels to coyotes.

FROM LEFT: RAB CUMMINGS (RIFLE, BULLET, DIE SET)



POWDER	PRIMER	BULLET	VELOCITY	ACCURACY
12.3-GR. AA-1680	CCI BR-4 PRIMER	20-GR. VARMAGEDDON TIPPED	3,630 FPS	.6 IN.
12.4-GR. AA-1680	CCI BR-4 PRIMER	20-GR. V-MAX	3,650 FPS	.6 IN.
12.2-GR. AA-1680	CCI BR-4 PRIMER	20-GR. BERGER VARMINT	3,600 FPS	.5 IN.
10.8-GR. N-120	WSR PRIMER	20-GR. VARMAGEDDON TIPPED	3,550 FPS	.8 IN.
10.7-GR. N-120	REM. 6.5 PRIMER	20-GR. BERGER VARMINT	3,500 FPS	.85 IN.

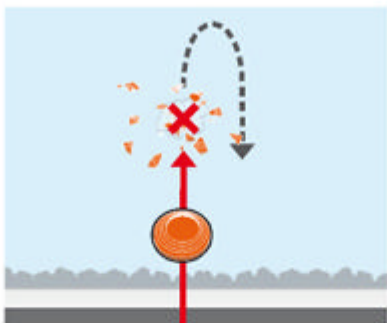
* ALL LOADS ARE 1.72 IN. OAL EXCEPT THE BERGERS, WHICH ARE 1.71 IN. OAL



Teal fly like jet fighters with feathers. Practicing now on clays will pay dividends when duck season opens.

SHOTGUNNING'S TOUGH TRIO

ANGLE, SPEED, AND DISTANCE MAKE THESE SHOTS EXTREMELY FRUSTRATING, BUT WITH PROPER FORM YOU CAN CONSISTENTLY HIT THESE BIRDS **BY BRAD FITZPATRICK**



SPRINGING TEAL: THE DANCING DEVIL

WHY IT'S HARD: The target slows down, peaks, and then speeds up as it descends, so the velocity is always changing. In addition, to break this target correctly, your barrels will blot out the clay, so you won't see it when you fire.

MISTAKE TO AVOID: Shooting at the top. It's often too far away, it's harder than it looks, and you lessen your chances of hitting a double.

HOW TO CRUSH IT: Catch the target as it's rising, pass it, and press the trigger. Keep the muzzle moving at all times. Maintain a good cheek weld, bend your back to lift the muzzle, and grip the gun lightly so your swing is smooth and fluid.



HIGH DRIVEN BIRD: STRETCHING THE RANGE LIMITS

WHY IT'S HARD: There's only one way to shoot this target consistently, and, like the teal, it requires you to shoot when the target is out of sight.

MISTAKE TO AVOID: Thinking too much. If you shoot using sustained lead, the cheats you use on the skeet range won't work here. Avoid the temptation to check your lead. If you stop swinging the muzzle at any point, you'll miss.

HOW TO CRUSH IT: Keep your eyes up and the muzzle low. When the target appears, lift the muzzle and start swinging, arching your back in much the same way you did for the teal shot. Pass the target, keep swinging, and press the trigger.



OVER-THE-SHOULDER QUARTERING: A GEOMETRY LESSON IN THE SKY

WHY IT'S HARD: It's more a hunting shot than a target shot. You're dealing with a variety of factors: line of travel, angle parallel to the hunter, and speed.

MISTAKE TO AVOID: Throwing your gun in frustration. The most common problems are not getting the barrels in line with the bird's path and shooting behind the target.

HOW TO CRUSH IT: Get on line parallel with the bird and rotate your hips to track your target, pressing the trigger as you pass. On doves and grouse, you'll be swinging hard to catch up, and the speed of the muzzle will give you the lead you need. As always, follow through.

HOW TO MEASURE GROUPS

A PRECISE METHOD TO DETERMINE ACCURACY **BY WADE HULL**

To measure groups the right way, do this: Place a single shot on the side of the target and measure that with a caliper. Subtract that value from the edge-to-edge distance between the two farthest shots of your groups. Depending on the quality of the paper and the type of target backing, that calibration shot might be larger or smaller than the bullet caliber you're shooting.

Another option is to use caliber-specific gauges that attach to calipers. Sinclair International sells these. They offer two models, both of which measure three calibers. One has cutouts for .22-, 6mm-, and .30-caliber bullets, the other handles .25, 6.5mm, and 7mm bullets. (\$26 each; sinclairintl.com)

Digital calipers allow for great precision when measuring groups and don't cost much. Good units can be had for about \$30.

RAB CUMMINGS

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A HAND-
FUL OF HARDY
'CRAWLERS IS
READY FOR
SHIPPING.

The BAIT BOSSSES



IT'S A CINCH YOU'VE NEVER HEARD OF THEM, BUT THESE SIX MEN HAVE LIKELY HELPED MORE ANGLERS PUT MORE FISH IN THEIR BOATS THAN ALL THE GUIDES IN NORTH AMERICA

The sludge was part mud, part hay, and a lot of manure. The recent rain germinated the stench of the dirt goulash, which stuck between the fingers of Dirk Dekker, hunched for the past six hours in a dark, lonely field 70 miles west of Toronto, Canada, handpicking nightcrawlers from the mire. His back ached and his knees throbbed nonstop from the squatting, bending, and constant crabbing about. But the sun wouldn't come up for another hour or two, and there was more money squirming on the topsoil. Most anglers don't understand that the worms purchased in little cartons from their local tackle shop were plucked one at a time under a shroud of darkness, discomfort, and muck. But live bait doesn't simply magically appear.

Dekker is just one of hundreds of outdoorsmen who have turned a passion for fishing into a thriving business. While the simple purchase of a dozen live shad or a carton of nightcrawlers is the start to your fishing day, it is the hard-earned reward for some of the most resourceful outdoorsmen in the industry.

BY JAMES HALL

PHOTOGRAPHS BY FINN O'HARA

OUTDOOR LIFE 2015

THE WORM PICKER

DIRK DEKKER / MOOREFIELD, ONTARIO, CANADA



CATCH 'EM UP:

"To pick your own worms, go to a recently tilled field at night after a good rain. Optimal air temperature is between 55 and 70 degrees. When you see one, quickly grab it but don't pull. Eventually it will relax enough for you to remove it from the hole without ripping it in half."



DEKKER'S FIRST NIGHT crawling for worms was in the spring of 1986, when he realized that his pig farm in Moorefield, Ontario, wasn't going to pay the bills for his family of five. Picking nightcrawlers was a dirty job that had sustained Canadians for decades, but few were willing to swallow enough pride to stoop, literally, that low. But after a month of supplying a local buyer, Dekker saw a bright future in the mud at his feet.

"The supplier I sold my worms to



FROM FAR LEFT: DEKKER PREPARES A WORM SHIPMENT IN HIS WAREHOUSE; THE HARVEST; PICKERS WORK FIELDS WITH A CAN STRAPPED TO EACH LEG—ONE FOR CRAWLER CONTAINMENT AND THE OTHER FILLED WITH SAWDUST TO DRY WORM-SLIMED FINGERS.

a worm before it gets back in its hole. You leave the small ones and snatch the big ones. For each one you grab, there may be 10 more that get away."

Once the can is full, the worms are dumped into a small mesh bag and left in the field. After the sun comes up, each picker goes back and collects his bags and delivers them to the foreman at the site.

"Once we get the worms to our warehouse, we go through a two-part process to make sure we deliver only the finest product to our partners," says Dekker. "First, we put all the worms in boxes of soil. The strong, healthy worms will dig their way to the bottom while the weak worms stay on top. After two weeks, we flip the boxes and grab all the ones at the bottom and put them in cartons of peat moss."

If demand doesn't equal his supply, the worms are stored in a huge cooler, where they are fed and re-bedded once a month.

"This business isn't for everybody, though," Dekker says. "On a really good night, a picker can earn up to \$600. But on a bad night, it might only be \$100."

had been in the business for 30 years and wanted to sell out. So, I bought it and created Country Bait." And over the past 29 years, Dekker, now 59, has managed to build one of the biggest nightcrawler supply houses (*countrybait.com*) in North America, shipping millions of worms throughout the U.S., Canada, and Europe.

"When I started picking in 1986, a good night for one person was 10,000. Now, a really good picker can get 25,000 worms per night. The unofficial record for one person is 50,000 earthworms in a single night."

To pick nightcrawlers, a person suits up with a tin can strapped to each ankle. One can is filled with sawdust, the other holds the gathered worms. "You can pick one worm with no problem. The second one is slippery, and the third is downright impossible to grab unless you submerge your fingers in the sawdust."

With the help of a headlamp, you look for worms that have come to the surface to eat or mate. On a decent night, you hardly have to move more than a yard to grab 50 worms. "When you watch a field full of pickers, they look motionless. You have to move very slowly but react quickly to grab

**"THE UNOFFICIAL
RECORD FOR
ONE PERSON
IS 50,000
EARTHWORMS
IN A SINGLE
NIGHT!"**

DEKKER'S WRIGGLER

WIRE
LEADER FOR
TOOTHY
FISH

LONG-SHANK
BAIT-HOLDER
HOOK

WHOLE
CRAWLER

RIG 'EM UP: "Instead of threading the entire worm body on a hook, leave some small sections dangling free. Part of the enticement of healthy, live worms is the wiggle. If you thread the whole bait on the shank, you lose this attraction."

THE SHAD MAN

SHAWN McNEW / ACWORTH, GEORGIA



CATCH 'EM UP: "If you're just starting out, it's best to use a smaller net. Some guys think that throwing a big 12-foot cast net is more efficient because you can capture more bait with each cast. However, you can cast, dump fish, and reload an 8-footer in 30-second cycles. This means you can typically make four casts in the amount of time it takes to get a 12-footer reset."

"DAD HAD ME
FISHING
BEFORE
I WAS OUT
OF DIAPERS.
WE'D USE ONLY
LIVE BAIT—
SHAD MAINLY."



clients depending on him, and a family of three to feed with the proceeds.

This Acworth, Georgia, entrepreneur has had a lifelong fascination with striped bass and, in turn, with their forage.

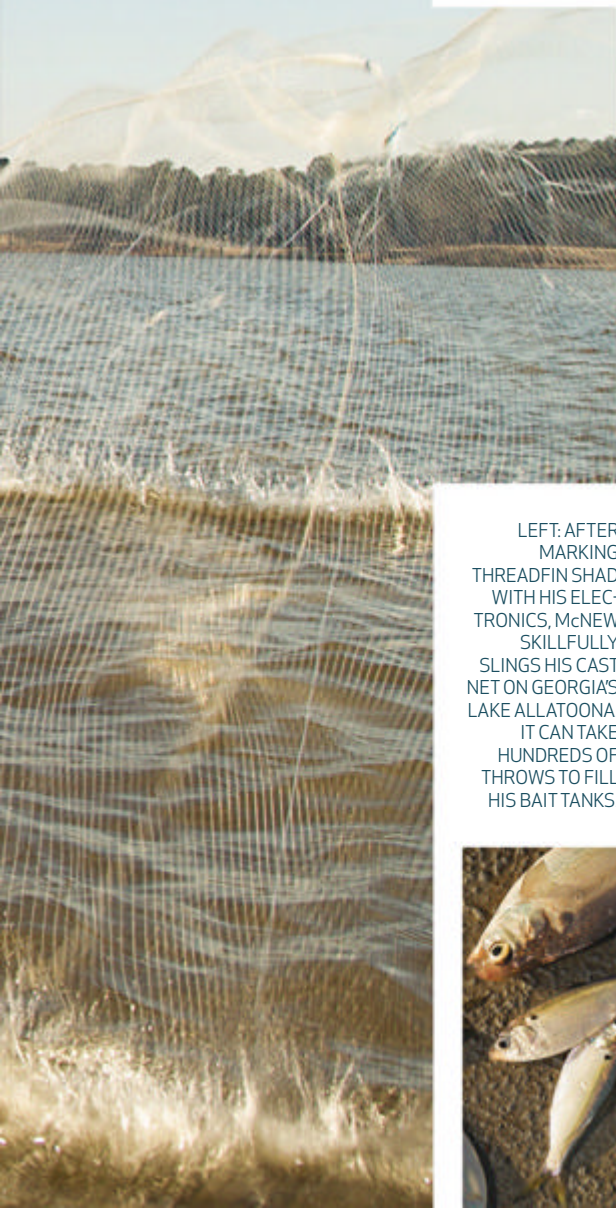
"Dad had me fishing before I was out of diapers. We'd use only live bait—shad mainly. By the time I was 8 years old, I was throwing a cast net," says McNew. The now 39-year-old never lost the desire his father instilled in him on the banks of Georgia's Lake Sinclair, and it seemed to blossom further while he was attending the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.

"Honestly, I fished a whole lot more than I studied. I started a guide business before I graduated and quickly decided that was what I wanted to do." But to be a striper guide, you have to be able to catch bait. And McNew had that talent in spades.

"You have to be able to catch shad 365 days a year to be successful. So, just as important as learning the ways of stripers is learning the ways of what they eat. After countless hours on different bodies of water, I have a Ph.D. in that department."

McNew moved back to Georgia in 2004 after graduating with a Bachelor of Science in fisheries biology, and started StriperSoup.com, an online forum for all things striped bass. In 2012, after earning a reputation for catching shad when nobody else could, McNew decided to become a bait provider and opened a shop. Now he's not only had a three-year run of always having live shad on hand for anglers, but he also supplies other bait shops in the region (Alabama, Tennessee, and Georgia) with live shad.

"The most important aspect of being a bait supplier is having good sources of healthy fish. So, I'll drive up to three hours to catch them," says



LEFT: AFTER MARKING THREADFIN SHAD WITH HIS ELECTRONICS, McNEW SKILLFULLY SLINGS HIS CAST NET ON GEORGIA'S LAKE ALLATOONA. IT CAN TAKE HUNDREDS OF THROWS TO FILL HIS BAIT TANKS.



SHAWN McNEW'S fingers were frozen in the shape of a claw, gripped with the ache of another cramp. It hurt worse than the blisters and tiny, bleeding cuts on his fingers because the 40-degree water had numbed his skin. The muscles would eventually relax so he could continue. They had to, because although he had thrown the 10-foot cast net more than 400 times in the past eight hours, he still needed more shad. He had



McNew. Catching healthy fish means nothing if you can't keep them alive, which is why he built a 170-gallon tank on his boat. He maintains a 70-gallon secondary tank in case the fishing is remarkable or the shad are oversize, and he created what he calls the "shad wagon," a trailer with three additional 70-gallon tanks.

McNew will arrive at the lake at dawn, sometimes after a three-hour drive. Then comes the work. A lot of work. He will throw either an 8- or 10-foot net until he fills the custom livewell, which holds 80 pounds of shad—that's equivalent to about 6,000 four-inch threadfin or 2,000 six-inch gizzard shad. On a great day, he can be done in an hour, with just a handful of throws. On brutal days, he can be well into his eighth hour and 400th cast without filling his limit.

From April through June, McNew is on the water at least once every weekday—sometimes twice. From July through September, he cast-nets on average four days a week. During the winter months, an every-other-week visit to the lake is all that's needed.

"All told, I'll catch somewhere between 4,000 and 5,000 pounds of shad per year, and every ounce is with a cast net," says McNew.

RIG 'EM UP: "When hooking a live threadfin, go between the nostrils. Lip-hooking is no good because it's way too easy for a fish to steal your bait. And if you hook one behind the dorsal, it can't swim naturally and will die quickly."

SHAWN'S SHAD

OFFSET
BAIT HOOK

NOSTRIL-
HOOKED
SHAD



THE CRUSTACEAN COLLECTOR

TONY CUCCIA / CHALMETTE, LOUISIANA

WHEN "THE STORM" HIT—that's how residents of southern Louisiana still refer to Hurricane Katrina—one of Tony Cuccia's shrimp boats, a 30-footer, simply evaporated. His second, a 35-footer, was lifted from its dock and impaled on a nearby piling. His entire shrimping business, which he and his sons had cultivated since 1980 in Chalmette, Louisiana, was skewered dead center by a telephone pole-size piece of wood.

"I moved here in 1961," the 71-year-old says, "and found that there was a need to provide live bait for fishermen. There was just one guy selling live shrimp, and he wasn't open often."

So, Cuccia bought a 14-foot Boston Whaler and a small trawler. Along with sons Anthony and Kevin, he commenced shrimping the waters between his home just southeast of New Orleans and Breton Sound, a barrier island 25 miles into the Gulf of Mexico.

"It was a huge learning curve. We'd run the shipping channels and get hung up on wrecks, or lose trawls to reefs. But, we stuck with it and made a name for ourselves."

While the majority of shrimpers focus on catching food shrimp—which are caught and stored on ice, where they die—catching these crustaceans and then keeping them alive is a whole different ball game.

"On a typical day, we will leave about 4:30 a.m. We head to our first spot and drop the trawls. Unlike the food-shrimp guys, we can only leave our nets in the water for about five to seven minutes, otherwise the shrimp will drown. So, we pick 'em up 20 to 25 times a day. It's a tremendous amount of work," Cuccia says.

Once a net is pulled up, the shrimp are placed in a picking well that is 18 inches wide and spans the length of the boat. Here, they sort the shrimp by hand based on size, and cull any bycatch.

"Once you get the shrimp on the boat, you have to be on your A game. We pride ourselves on delivering healthy live shrimp, and to do that you absolutely cannot stress 'em out. So we get rid of all the trash, which allows for fewer casualties, and get those shrimp in our aeration tanks with a minimum of handling." On a good day, Cuccia can be off the water by noon with 2,000 to 3,000 live shrimp in his coffers.

Of course, the superstorm of 2005 put a damper on this pursuit for the majority of coastal Louisiana's shrimping industry. On top of his boat crisis, Cuccia also lost his shop—the Fisherman's Friend Bait Shop—and had to completely rebuild.

"We were able to get the 35-footer patched. Put a new outboard on her and repaired or replaced everything needed to get back on the water. We run only the one boat now, but we catch enough live shrimp to keep our shop stocked year-round. Plus, we supply one other area bait shop with live shrimp."

To do so, the Cuccias are on the water six days a week, weather permitting.

"Live shrimp only last about three to five days in containment. You don't want them to get old. So, we fish a lot. And sometimes you work like crazy to have a shop full of shrimp only to have the weather turn bad and the fishermen don't come. For this work, you have to love it—it has to be in your blood."

CATCH 'EM UP: "You can catch shrimp with a cast net. Focus on a flat where the water shallows up next to a cut, then use little dog food pellets to bait an area." **RIG 'EM UP:** "Hooking a live shrimp under its horn keeps it alive longer. Also, gluing a piece of mesh inside your bait bucket so the shrimp have something to hold on to will keep them frisky."

ILLUSTRATIONS BY LEO ZAROSINSKI

THE CRAYFISH KING

KELLY HUTSON / DURHAM, CALIFORNIA



FROM TOP: PHOTOS COURTESY OF KELLY HUTSON (2); RANDAL FORD

HUTSON WITH
A MOTHERLODE
OF CRAYFISH
TRAPPED IN THE
CALIFORNIA
DELTA.

CATCH 'EM UP: "Put your trap along the deep edge of a river, where the bank hits the river bottom. This is like a highway for the crayfish. They congregate on this seam to wait for dead fish to wash down the river."

K

KELLY HUTSON was intent on becoming a computer programmer when he enrolled at California State University in Chico. However, when a friend showed him how to catch crayfish out of a rice field, Hutson hit the delete button on the computer science degree.

"It was 1986 when I first went out with my buddy. I realized, man, you can make a lot of money doing this. Plus, you don't have to sit staring at a computer screen all day. And you can avoid big cities altogether. So I was all in," he says.

In 1987, Hutson bought a small johnboat, and along with fishing the rice fields for wild crayfish, he started plying nearby rivers. Eventually, his rounds would take him all the way to the Sacramento River and the California Delta, and over to the Feather River that feeds Lake Oroville.

The demand for crayfish seemed endless. In 2002, he upgraded to a custom aluminum boat that included an electric winch to help raise his crayfish traps.

"During the peak of the season, I'll wake up around 6 a.m., drive to where my traps are laid (often up to 100 miles one way). I usually have 150 to 250 traps set at any one time," Hutson says.

His traps are connected by a heavy line, usually 1,200 feet long, with a trap clipped to it every 40 feet. To run a line, Hutson has to pull his rig from trap to trap, retrieve each one off the bottom, empty the crayfish into a storage tote,

re bait the trap, and stack it in the boat before moving on. Once the entire line is pulled, he moves to a new section and drops the line again.

"I generally cover 5 to 20 miles of river per day, depending on how many I'm catching. Overall, I hope to catch about a pound of crayfish per trap. I'll fish right up until dark."

Hutson delivers his catch to two different wholesalers in Sacramento, who sell his crayfish to the food industry. He also sells to Bob's Bait Shop in Isleton, California, which supplies all of northern California with the live crustaceans.

"I typically fish four days a week and spend the rest of the time on the road—I put 50,000 miles on my truck last year alone. Between the food market and bass fishermen, I sell all I can catch."

RIG 'EM UP: "The best size for bass fishing is a 2-incher. There are three major segments to the tail, so hook the bait through the middle segment from the bottom up. I like to put a little split shot above the craw to help it find the bottom. This will keep your bait alive longer."

**KELLY'S
CRUSHER**

**TAIL-HOOKED
CRAYFISH
ON NO. 4 BAIT
HOLDER**

**VARY HOOK
SIZE WITH
CRAYFISH
SIZE**

THE CIGAR AFICIONADO

PAUL BAKER / PACE, FLORIDA

BAKER STOWS THE CAST NET AND BREAKS OUT SABIKI RIGS WHEN BAITFISH BALL UP IN DEEP WATER.

IT'S 2 A.M. IN PACE, Florida, a small community on the outskirts of Pensacola. Except for a police officer or two, Paul Baker has the road, and the boat launch on Pensacola Bay, to himself. He operates The Bait Boat, a floating source for area anglers who fish out of Pensacola Pass. (He also provides forage fish to 30 bait shops from Gulf Shores, Alabama, to Panama City.) Unlike many live-bait suppliers, Baker catches his fish the morning before they are to be sold.

"I moved here from Missouri

12 years ago and fell in love with saltwater fishing. I taught myself how to catch bait and became infatuated with making it easier, doing it better. Eventually, the locals started coming to me for bait, and The Bait Boat was born."

Baker developed a special chum mixture that cigar minnows can't seem to resist. Still, his system requires crazy hours and a dedication that not many have.

"I want to be on the water around 2 a.m., ideally on a slack tide. I'll anchor up on the outside of the pass and drop down a frozen block of my chum, as well as two underwater lights. Then, I simply wait until daylight."

Once there is enough light for him

CATCH 'EM UP
"Net color matters. When you're casting a net in winter, use the standard clear netting. But in spring, when there is more algae in the water, you'll catch a lot more with a teal-colored net. In fall, I go to a red net. For deep netting, put tape around the edges to keep it open as it sinks."

RIG 'EM UP: "I like to chum with cut-up cigar minnows over wrecks. A lot of times, the bigger fish will come up in the water column. Then, I'll free-line a 'livie' on a circle hook, running the point through the lower lip or eyes. If fish are deep, I use 1 ounce of weight per 10 feet down."

1 OZ.
WEIGHT

OFFSET
CIRCLE
HOOK



THE SKIPJACK BROTHERS

TYLER AND MICHAEL MOSES / FLORENCE, ALABAMA

to see the baitfish circling his boat, he starts throwing a Super Spreader cast net to the schools of fish.

"After a couple of casts, the cigar minnows will become wary and dive lower in the water column. Once this happens, I'll start throwing some floating chum on the surface of the water, and the action starts all over again."

Weather permitting, Baker is on the water every day of the week, save Sunday, spring through fall. During the winter months, you can find his boat anchored outside the pass Thursday through Sunday.

"I have five children and a beautiful wife, and this business has not only allowed me to provide for them, but also allows me to teach my children how the business works."

Oftentimes his kids will be on the boat repairing nets, sorting bait, or helping drive-up customers with orders. Plus, much of the leftover cigar minnows are vacuum-sealed and iced for transport to the many bait stores he supplies.

"I find it an honor to be a local family with a local business offering local bait. I just had my engine serviced and it had 1,300 hours on it just from last year. I don't regret a single minute of it. Some days are good and some days are great. But it's a blessing to provide a service that brings families together in the outdoors."

BAKER'S BUSTER



CIGAR MINNOW

Shooting trap competitively is an expensive hobby. Tyler Moses understood this, especially after his parents divorced. "I was pretty good at shooting, and had won state and competed in nationals by the time I was 14. But after the divorce, we really couldn't afford it."

That is, until Tyler walked into a bait shop near his hometown of Florence, Alabama, and saw shad guts for sale. "I couldn't believe people bought that. So, I figured it would be an easy way to make money to help keep me shooting."

He and his brother, Michael, then started going below dams on the Tennessee River to catch skipjack herring. They knew the owner of the bait store, and he eagerly bought the skipjack to resell to catfishermen.

"It was really nothing official in the beginning. But eventually, we started making contacts, and when the catfish tournaments would come to town, competitors would actually call us to order bait. We'd have skipjack when nobody else could catch them."

Now 21 years old and attending the University of South Alabama in Mobile, Tyler has made it official. The Moses brothers' T&M Bait Co. is the go-to supplier for the most serious tournament catfishermen in the country, including the legendary Bill Dance, as well as a half dozen bait stores in northern Alabama and southern Tennessee.

"The serious catfish anglers know that freshly dead bait is important. And how you treat bait as soon as you catch it makes all the difference in the world," Tyler says.

Unlike most freshwater bait, skipjack

must be caught on rod and reel. This makes the process slow and often frustrating for the casual bait pursuer. Tyler, though, has the process honed to a fine science.

"We use sabiki rigs, like the saltwater guys use. That way, we can land multiple fish at a time. The trick, though, is to be able to land several fish and quickly get them off the hook without destroying your rig or hooking yourself in the process."

Typically, the Moses brothers will launch their oversize aluminum boat at daylight and head for the tailraces of Pickwick, Wilson, or Wheeler dams, sister impoundments on the Tennessee River. As skipjack are sight-feeders, it does no good to try to catch them at night. Once they find a current seam holding the bait, they cast the multi-hook rigs for as many times as it takes to fill their coolers. A 10-hour day is not unusual.

"We throw the fish on ice immediately and keep layering ice between catches. If you skimp on ice, the fish will overheat and turn mushy—worthless as bait."

If there is not an immediate need for the skipjack, the brothers vacuum-seal the bait and keep it in one of eight freezers they maintain in their garage. The profits from the bait business have been shifted from competitive shooting to getting through college. Michael is currently attending the University of Alabama, Birmingham.

"We work our tails off in the summer to fill the freezers with good bait. Then, during school breaks, we get back out to catch as much as we can to make it through the winter."

CATCH 'EM UP: "Skipjack are predatory and can grow up to a couple of pounds. So use small but strong hooks. A little Twister Tail is a great bait if you don't want to fool with a sabiki." **RIG 'EM UP:** "For catfish, I walk a piece of cut bait with the current. To do this, tie a three-way rig where your weight is about 18 inches under your line tied to the hook."



Chicago Doctor Invents Affordable Hearing Aid Outperforms Many Higher Priced Hearing Aids

Reported by J. Page

Chicago: Board-certified physician Dr. S. Cherukuri has done it once again with his newest invention of a medical grade **ALL DIGITAL affordable hearing aid**.

This new digital hearing aid is packed with all the features of \$3,000 competitors at a mere fraction of the cost. **Now, most people with hearing loss are able to enjoy crystal clear, natural sound — in a crowd, on the phone, in the wind — without suffering through “whistling” and annoying background noise.**

New Digital Hearing Aid Outperforms Expensive Competitors

This sleek, lightweight, fully programmed hearing aid is the outgrowth of the digital revolution that is changing our world. While demand for “all things digital” caused most prices to plunge (consider DVD players and computers, which originally sold for thousands of dollars and today can be purchased for less), yet the cost of a digital medical hearing aid remains out of reach.

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“Almost work too well. I am a teacher and hearing much better now” —Lillian Barden, California

“I have used many expensive hearing aids, some over \$5,000. The Airs have greatly improved my enjoyment of life” —Som Y., Michigan

“I would definitely recommend them to my patients with hearing loss” —Amy S., Audiologist, Indiana



Dr. Cherukuri knew that many of his patients would benefit but couldn’t afford the expense of these new digital hearing aids. Generally they are *not* covered by Medicare and most private health insurance.

The doctor evaluated all the high priced digital hearing aids on the market, broke them down to their base components, and then created his own affordable version — called the MDHearingAid® **AIR** for its virtually invisible, lightweight appearance.

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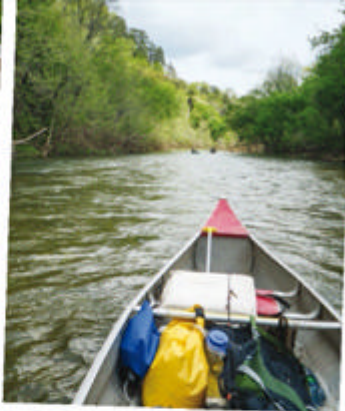
FLOAT AND HUNT YOUR WAY THROUGH THE HOMELAND OF THE WILD TURKEY—THE LIMESTONE RIVERS OF SOUTHERN MISSOURI'S OZARKS. AND DON'T FORGET YOUR FISHING ROD



TES RANDLE/JOLLY

EASTERN TURKEYS GATHER IN A SPRING GREENFIELD. MANY MID-WEST FLOCKS DESCEND FROM BIRDS TRAPPED IN MISSOURI.

BY ANDREW MCKEAN



➔ FROM LEFT: AN EASTERN GOBBLER; VIEW FROM THE CANOE; A NICE JACKS FORK SMALLIE; THE RIVER FROM ABOVE. LEFT: JOSH FLEMING COOLS HIS HEELS.

BUCK
HOLLOW

the middle of the last century, that biologists perfected the practice of baiting and net-gunning, capturing wild turkeys that were then stuffed into transport boxes and released in unpopulated habitat from Ontario to Kansas. So if there's a motherland for America's wild turkey, this is it, which is why I found myself here, huffing up a lung, scrambling to the top of a steep, moss-slick ridge to engage with a gobbler that had been singing since sunup.

I had joined my friends from the National Wild Turkey Federation and the Missouri Department of Conservation on the Jacks Fork of the Current River to hunt birds in a place that has always heard the thunder of a spring gobbler. This turkey homeland is made up almost entirely of public ground, and because a river runs through the middle of it, it is suited to a unique style of hunting. We would launch our canoes at dawn, paddle and float downstream until we heard a gobbler, and then beach our boats and figure out how to kill him.

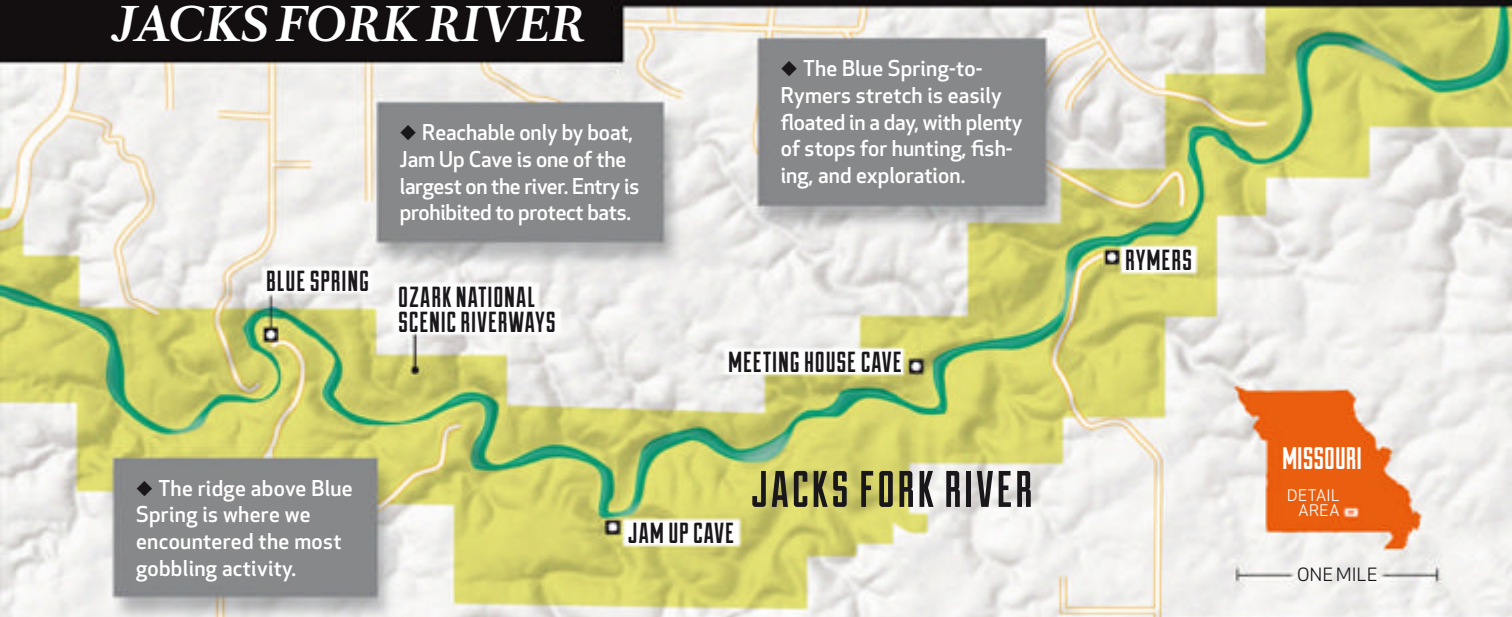
On our first morning, we hadn't been in our canoes more than 20 minutes when we heard the first gobble. We strained up a ridge, set up just over the crest, and called a lone tom right to my shotgun. I missed that shot and have played it over and over in my mind because that was the last turkey we called into range. For the next three days, we floated and called and hiked thousands of acres of the Ozarks. We worked several different birds, but never got the satisfaction of canoing with a dead tom in the bow.

CROSS NEARLY all of the Eastern wild turkey's range, its story is one of loss and recovery, of the wildly successful reintroduction of an iconic species that was simply gone for generations.

But there's one place that never lost its turkeys: the steep white-oak ridges and plunging limestone hollers of Missouri's Ozarks. The turkeys remained for the same reason that hunting them here is so challenging: because the country is huge and rugged, and the birds, their senses sharpened by more than two hundred years of uninterrupted hunting pressure, are diabolically smart and evasive.

It's here along the forks of the Current River, where the few remaining wild turkeys were discovered in

JACKS FORK RIVER



WILD AND SCENIC

Despite a lack of birds, I'd recommend this hunt to anyone willing to work for a tall-timber tom on public land. The stretch of the Jacks Fork we hunted is within the Ozark National Scenic Riverways corridor, which is managed by the National Park Service and bordered by tens of thousands of acres of state and federal recreation lands. That means the land above the river is

nearly all public, so if you hear a gobbler, there's a good chance that you can make a play for him without having to worry about trespassing.

Camp at established sites, and float as far as you want in a day. Fish when you're not hunting. Because each day of Missouri's spring turkey season ends at 1 p.m., we spent the afternoons casting to scrappy smallmouth bass and exploring riverside caves and springs.

IF YOU GO



Timing: We hunted near the end of Missouri's three-week season, so the birds we encountered had already heard plenty of hunters' calls. It's probably best to hunt early—this year the season opened April 20—and be prepared for sketchy weather in order to hunt relatively unpressured toms.

Boating: The Jacks Fork's flow is controlled by natural springs at its headwaters, but it can run high following rains. Your paddling skills must be sharp; pack all your gear in dry bags, because the odds of tipping a canoe are pretty good.

Fishing: The smallmouth density in these spring-fed rivers is remarkably high, but the spring-clear water puts a premium on lure choice and presentation. Downsize your gear, and use pinpoint casts and drift-free floats with small tube jigs and creature baits, or twitch shallow-running hard-body baits. The biggest and best fish hang around submerged timber, so expect to snag up

and lose plenty of tackle to the river.

Permits: Float permits and reservations are not required for recreational floating or hunting. Visit the National Park Service's site (nps.gov/ozar) for details, maps, and restrictions.

Campsites: Established tent and trailer campsites cost \$14 per night, or you can camp in an unimproved backcountry site (as we did) for \$5 per night.

Canoe Rental: If you can't bring your own canoe and float gear, not to worry. At least a dozen concessions offer rentals. We used Harvey's Alley Spring Canoe Rental (888-963-5628; harveysalleyspring.com)

FROM THE OZARKS TO EVERYWHERE



According to records kept by the Missouri Department of Conservation, more than 5,000 Eastern wild turkeys that were trapped in Missouri have been translocated to other states and provinces. They are the seed stock for flocks that have grown to number in the tens of thousands. The translocation program started in 1958 with a single turkey trapped in southern Missouri and released in Ohio.

The transplant operation culminated in 1984, when nearly 900 Missouri turkeys were released in Kentucky, Arkansas, Indiana, and Ontario.

Most of the state's birds were trapped in the remote hills around the Current, Jacks Fork, and Elevenpoint rivers. This habitat is now the focus of a new restoration effort. Kentucky, a state that benefited from Missouri's turkey largesse, has given elk to the Show-Me State, and the biggest release area is just southeast of the Jacks Fork. Soon, canoeing hunters may have the chance to chase bugling bulls across the ridges and limestone hollers of the Ozarks.



FISHING
ADVENTURE



ROUGH COMPANY

THE POPULARITY OF BOWFISHING IS SURGING ACROSS THE COUNTRY, BUT NOWHERE IS THE SPORT OF SKEWERING CARP MORE CELEBRATED THAN AT THE WORLD'S LARGEST BOWFISHING TOURNAMENT, HELD EACH SPRING IN THE HEART OF THE OZARKS

BY NATALIE KREBS • PHOTOGRAPHS BY MATT NAGER



51

Omaha's Team Domeshot boated 360 pounds of fish to take 16th place in the U.S. Open Bowfishing Championship.



Clockwise from left:
Briceson Lanphar
draws on a fish; the
Lanphars celebrate a
catch; carp in a cooler;
trucks depart the
starting line; hun-
dreds of rough fish.

**“SHOOT IT!” SHANON
LANPHAR HOLLERS
AS HE SPINS THE
BOAT AROUND,
WATER SLAPPING
AGAINST THE HULL.
“THERE IT GOES!
C’MON! SHOOT IT!”**

Shanon’s son Briceson grabs his bow and scrambles to the side, scanning the waves. The teenager draws and releases. A miss. He reels hastily and nocks for a second shot when another arrow parts the water. His uncle, Travis Lanphar, reels in the target—a sodden map of Missouri’s Table Rock Lake. Moments earlier the wind had ripped the map from Travis’ grasp and flung it into the wake of the modified johnboat. Now the dripping map wilts in his broad hands, an irregular hole punched through the belly of the Ozarks.

Shanon claps a hand on his brother’s shoulder and together they inspect the serpentine sprawl of this impoundment of the White River. Somewhere behind the hills, the sun is setting. The motor roars and the boat speeds away.

MAIN ATTRACTION

The Lanphar family drove more than a thousand miles from their hometown of Haines City, Fla., to Branson, Mo., last May. The latter is known as the Las Vegas of the Midwest, but the Lanphars came for an entirely different kind of entertainment: bowfishing for carp, gar, and buffalo.

Rough fish, trash fish, non-game fish—no matter what you call them, they’re a



big enough draw that 900-plus archers from 27 states traveled to the Missouri Ozarks to compete in the second annual U.S. Open Bowfishing Championship. More than \$45,000 in cash and prizes—including a cool \$10,000 to the first-place winners—creates additional incentive. Not only is this region home to the tournament's sponsor, Bass Pro Shops, but the twin lakes of Table Rock and Bull Shoals provide enough elbow room for all those shooters—and more than enough fish to fill their boats.

Although gar and buffalo are native species, introduced common carp have slowly been crowding out local flora and fauna for decades (as opposed to invasive Asian grass carp, which have spread up Mississippi River tributaries only in the last 20 years), and their increasing densities are jeopardizing healthy water systems.

The U.S. Open Bowfishing Championship provides an opportunity for a little payback, because in bowfishing, one thing is for sure: Catch-and-release is not an option.

THE ARROWS FLY

The centerpiece of the three-day event is the 12 hours of sanctioned competition fishing, from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. on the second night.

The team that shoots the 20 heaviest fish takes home the top prize.

Many competitors customized their boats with welded shooting platforms and searing HID lights that produce upward of 200,000 lumens. An hour before the nocturnal bowhunt starts, a procession of half-ton diesels towing these tricked-out boats winds through the dusty event grounds. Drivers file past officials and cheering crowds. Horns blare as teams head to the dozens of launches on the two lakes. Competitors arrived as much as a week in advance to scout, and the time has come to put that recon to work.

Some teams sport matching uniforms splashed with sponsor logos, but the Twisted Limbs, as the Lanphars are known, wear jeans, flannel, and camouflage. Caps and polarized shades conceal the brothers' matching shaved heads and clear eyes, but their beards are hard to miss. True to their Sunshine State background, the shooting platform on their boat is made of aluminum floorboards reclaimed from an old citrus truck.

"I'm going to tell you right now: Bowfishing is super addictive. It's going to take all your money from you," Travis says with a laugh as he twists around in the truck's passenger seat. "It's a blast, though. We grew up fishing traditionally, but I haven't picked up a rod and reel since I started bowfishing. And that's amazing because I build fishing rods for fun."

Shanon pulls into a convenience store parking lot. Snacks and caffeine will fuel the all-nighter ahead. Another truck pulls up. If the stadium lights hanging off the boat it's towing don't immediately identify the truck's passengers, the decals plastered to the back window do. One reads in all caps, AIM LOW.

It's just after 7 p.m., and Briceson, 14, squirms in the backseat of his dad's truck. He's so excited he can't stop talking.

"At school they always ask, 'How do you get the arrow back?' So I tell them, 'You have to swim down there and get it.'"

Laughter erupts from the front seat.

"This. This is why I love doing this, right here." Shanon jabs a thumb over his shoulder. "I love the fact that he goes outdoors and does this stuff. It's something that me and him and my brother can do together. He's excited about it. He loves it, and I love that. A lot of kids—you don't see that anymore."



FISHING
ADVENTURE



Left to right: Sunset signals game on; a full quiver; Parker Watkins of Arkansas; supporters at the tourney grounds; Shanon Lanphar hoists his 54-inch gar; early-morning weigh-in; JR Shimon practices with his son; a fat carp; Rich Porter (right) and Nick Wright take aim.

PRIMITIVE EVOLUTION

Even in its second year, the U.S. Open was booming, and the 2015 contest is slated to be even larger (see below). Bowfishing tournaments are nothing new—local clubs have been running their own for decades—but many bowfishers say such a large-scale event wasn't viable until recently. A few years ago, no one would have guessed this back-channel pastime could draw nearly a thousand competitors from coast to coast, including archery-industry veterans like Dave White.

When White purchased the manufacturing company Cajun Archery in 2004, bowfishing gear made up roughly 10 percent of the company's product line. By the time Bear Archery bought Cajun Archery in 2012, that figure had risen to 70 percent—no small feat considering the growth occurred during the Great Recession.

"Bowfishing was picking up in popularity anyway, and the cost of getting into it wasn't prohibitive, so it grew despite the recession," White says. "Archery wasn't hurt so bad, but it didn't expand like the bowfishing niche."

White's company specialized in arrows and points, and manufactured basic starter kits that sold for around \$30. These proved to be a gateway product, as retailers reported tremendous response: Customers almost always returned to upgrade.

Former Cajun Archery pro-staffer Rich Porter is currently the tournament director for Bowfishers of Nebraska, and he has been the Bowfishing Association of America's Nebraska state representative for more than a decade. He's shot fish in 17 states and has personally introduced about 500 newcomers to the sport. In short, the guy is a junkie. He also has a couple of theories about the sport's popularity: It's cheap and accessible to beginners, and there are more targets swimming around than ever before.

"More than anything else, Asian carp have really put bowfishing on the map in the last 10 years," Porter says. "I used to bowfish one month out of the year, in May. Since the invasion of the Asian carp, I'm usually looking at a three- to four-month season."

BACKWOODS BOYS

Twisted Limbs got their name from the old, warped Ben Pearson recurve Travis

and Shanon shared when they first started bowfishing. These days, the Lanphars all shoot their own Oneida Osprey.

"It feels like a recurve but shoots like a compound," Briceson says of the hybrid rig in his hand, keeping his eyes on the water below.

It's 8:30 p.m., and the team is trolling the steep shores of Table Rock. Insects swarm the halo of light surrounding the boat, but the clear water doesn't reveal any fish. The first passes along the banks presented opportunities for carp, but a volley of arrows didn't stick anything. Over the course of a night, bowfishers will typically shoot dozens, even hundreds of times. Most archers keep their draw weight at about 40 pounds to prevent exhaustion, and in the interest of speed they draw without a release.

At home, the Lanphars shoot tilapia and catfish in murky water that's 6 feet deep at most. Now the team is adjusting to greater depths and superb water clarity, which makes accounting for refraction even more challenging. Even the oft-repeated mantra "aim low" isn't helping—yet.

After an hour on the water, Travis breaks the spell and dumps a gar in the boat. As soon as it hits the metal, Shanon spots another and lunges toward the platform edge. "That's way bigger than yours!" he yells.

He sinks a barbed arrow into the spine of a huge longnose. With a lot of teamwork and scrambling, they heave the bloody gar on board. "That's a hell of a fish!" Shanon bellows. "It got my heart pumping!" Travis returns his younger brother's high five. "That thing is huge!"

A buffalo swims under the boat. Briceson swivels and lets loose an arrow.

"That was deep, Bri," Travis says with a laugh as he slaps his nephew's back. "We'll get 'em in the shallows, right? Those deep ones are tough."

Sure enough, at 9:24 p.m., Briceson connects with his first fish of the night, a carp. "Nice one, Bubba!"

Shanon's big fish is still thrashing in the bottom of the boat when, 20 minutes later, he hauls a third gar aboard. Everyone is reinvigorated, ready to tackle the night ahead.

RISING THROUGH THE RANKS

Andy Cardwell, a Kentucky native and the new president of the Bowfishing Association of America, began bowfishing at the age of seven in the early 1980s. He shot a recurve fitted with an old coffee-can reel for spooling line. Eventually he graduated to a compound, and now he shoots the best rig money can buy.

"It's just like any hunting hobby," Cardwell says. "You can start out bowfishing for just dirt cheap. But the problem is, once it gets in your blood, then it's not dirt cheap anymore. You find yourself buying a \$40,000 airboat. Then you have to buy a truck to pull the airboat. And then you have to build a shop to hold the truck and the airboat. Then you get divorced."

BAA was founded in 1990, and it primarily sanctions and insures tournaments.

2015 U.S. OPEN BOWFISHING CHAMPIONSHIP

This year, the stakes are even higher at the U.S. Open, which is scheduled for June 12–14. Bass Pro is giving away \$100,000 total in cash and prizes, including \$25,000 to the first-place winners. The event is relocating to Bass Pro's headquarters in Springfield, Mo. Fishing will be permitted on five lakes: Table Rock, Bull Shoals, Truman, Pomme de Terre, and Stockton. There isn't a deadline to enter, but you'd better hurry: The competition is capped at 275 teams. Go to BASSPRO.COM/USOPEN for more information.



From top: Only a handful of competitors succeeded in popping a balloon suspended in the practice tank—even unmoving targets prove challenging; a gar at weigh-in; Twisted Limbs, from left: Travis, Briceson, and Shanon Lanphar.

“It had never been run correctly, I’ll tell you that straight out,” Cardwell says, referencing the lack of an active member list and tournament records when he first took the job. His vision for the organization involves expanding bowfishing education and preserving the sport, and he hopes this will continue to encourage bowfishing’s explosive growth.

Cardwell fished the 2014 U.S. Open with buddy John Paul Morris on his boat *Blood Vessel*, a pontoon that evokes the shark-painted fighter planes of World War II. Morris, the son of Bass Pro Shops founder Johnny Morris, calls bowfishing his favorite sport.

“The biggest thing we have going for us is that no one fishes traditionally for rough fish, so you’ve got this runaway population. They’re a lot like feral hogs,” Morris says. “It gives a great opportunity for guys to go out. There’s a lot of action and tons of fish everywhere. They’re helping the lakes and the rivers, and they’re having a blast.”

MONSTER HAUL

Meanwhile, back on Table Rock, the Lanphars slog through a six-hour fishless drought. Finally, at 3:40 a.m., Shanon lands a carp with a clean strike. They decide to end their night on a high note and pull up to the official scales an hour later, exhausted. Their five fish weigh a tidy 54.6 pounds.

As other anglers filter in, so do the fish reports. Evidently, a cold snap the preceding week had severely disrupted the spawn. Carp drifted between deep water and the shallows, and teams experienced varying degrees of success. The winning team would tip the scales with 20 fish weighing a whopping 376 pounds. All told, the tournament removed 40,000 pounds of rough fish from the lake, which were later converted into soil fertilizer.

Twenty of those pounds belong to Shanon’s big gar, which measures 54½ inches. For a while, it’s in the lead for longest gar, an award that would pay out \$5,000. But as the sky lightens, more and more boats roll in, and it isn’t long before a gar tapping more than 5 feet long edges out Shanon’s. The Lanphars pull away from the weigh station, dog-tired but already discussing next year’s strategy, bloody water still sloshing across the floorboards of their boat. 🐊🐊🐊

A TIP FROM A
**FORMER
SMOKER**

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Mariano, Age 55
Illinois

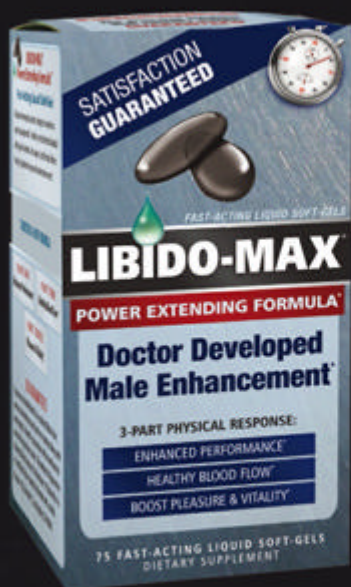
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WARNING PRODUCT SAFETY RECALL

Remington is voluntarily recalling Remington Model 887™ shotguns manufactured from December 1, 2013 through November 24, 2014.

Remington has determined that in some Remington Model 887™ shotguns manufactured between December 1, 2013 and November 24, 2014 the firing pin may bind in the forward position within the bolt, which can result in an unintentional discharge when chambering a live round. This may occur when the safety mechanism is on. Any unintentional discharge has the potential to cause injury or death. Therefore, Remington is voluntarily recalling ALL potentially affected products to inspect and repair.

HAZARD: If your shotgun was manufactured in the aforementioned time period, you should stop using your shotgun immediately due to the risk of unintentional discharge. To determine if your Model 887™ shotgun is affected by this recall, visit 887recall.remington.com/.

HOW TO DETERMINE IF YOUR SHOTGUN IS SUBJECT TO THE RECALL

Identify the serial number (located on the bottom of the receiver, forward of the loading port.) and provide it to Remington's recall support team, either by entering it at 887recall.remington.com or calling 1-800-243-9700 (Prompt #3 then Prompt #2) Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. EDT

REMEDY / ACTION TO BE TAKEN

STOP USING YOUR SHOTGUN. Any unintended discharge has the potential to cause injury or death. Immediately cease use of recalled shotguns and return them to Remington free of charge.

Remington will send you boxes and written instructions, and arrange for pick-up of your shotgun(s). Remington will cover all related shipping, inspection, and repair charges. Please do not return your shotgun on your own. Remington will arrange for pick-up of your Model 887™.

Remington is committed to ensuring the inspection, repair, and return of any affected shotgun.

DO NOT attempt to diagnose or repair recalled shotguns.

TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RECALL PROGRAM

Visit 887recall.remington.com or call 1-800-243-9700 (Prompt #3 then Prompt #2) Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. EDT. You will be asked to provide your name, address, telephone number, and shotgun(s) serial number.

SAFETY FIRST: Always follow the Ten Commandments of Firearm safety whenever you handle any firearm. Visit Remington.com for more information.

Remington is deeply sorry for this inconvenience, but we believe in safety first. It is imperative that Model 887 shotguns subject to this recall are not used until they have been inspected and repaired by Remington.

The Remington team is committed to the quality and safety of its products.

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PERSONAL DEFENSE

TIP

When selecting a personal protection load for a handgun, look for a bullet with good terminal ballistics, but run a few boxes of it through your firearm to make sure it feeds reliably.

One feature every good folder should have is a textured grip that provides a secure hold in cold and wet conditions.

TACTICAL FOLDERS

A GUIDE TO THE MOST VERSATILE CLASS OF KNIVES
BY ANTONIO BOLFO

N

Not all knives are created equal. Different types serve different purposes, and the tactical folder has become a mainstay in many folks' gear bag. Everything from blade design to handle geometry to the locking mechanism contributes to a knife's purpose, or "personality."

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for 50% more cleaning power.*





GRIP OPTIONS

1. Index Forward: With the index finger along the side of the blade, support the pommel in your palm. This prevents your hand from sliding up the blade if you hit a hard surface, such as wood or bone. **2. Pinch:** Use this to open the knife in the event the locking mechanism breaks. **3. Reverse:** Cap the pommel with the thumb to keep your hand from sliding down the blade.

WHY A FOLDER?

■ **ONE OF THE GREATEST** benefits of tactical folders is their ease of carry, which means one is more likely to be with you at a time of need. Outdoor aficionados understand that a solid fixed-blade knife is clearly a stronger, more versatile tool. However, for a daily companion, a fixed blade's length may present a challenge to concealment. Furthermore, in some places, carrying a fixed blade might be prohibited.

BLADE PROFILE

■ **THERE ARE A MULTITUDE** of blade designs out there, and it is easy for a person to get confused as to what each one is intended for. To start, let's look at the three most common uses for a knife: protection, utility, and medical emergency.

For a defensive situation, you want to have a blade profile that can easily penetrate not only skin and muscle, but also fabric. A fat, thick point, such as the tanto point, may be able to penetrate a car door, but it most likely won't go through a leather jacket. A spear point, with a thin, sharp-angled profile, is best for thrusting and puncturing.

For utility purposes, including construction, household fixes, or wedging, you want a thick tip, like that on the tanto-style blade. That thickness will

guard against chipping and breaking the tip when the blade encounters metal or other hard surfaces.

In a medical emergency, you might have to cut people out of seat belts, cut open their clothing to expose a wound, or start cutting supplies and fabrics to create makeshift tourniquets, bandages, slings, etc. In these situations, you're working the knife in close proximity to non-hostile personnel, and the risk of stabbing or cutting someone is high. A semi-serrated blade with a dull or flat tip is an excellent choice here.

LOCKING MECHANISMS AND HANDLE GEOMETRY

■ **ALL LOCKS BREAK** and will collapse if enough force is applied. The cheaper the knife, the more brittle its metal, and therefore, the more prone it is to failure. Many metals also flex under pressure, causing the locks to open. I only recommend using folders for thrusting or light cutting. When you start to slash with a folding knife, and force is applied perpendicular to the length of the blade, the locking mechanisms can fail. In my opinion, the frame lock is the most effective type. Not only is the knife secured open by the scale of the knife, but your grip helps keep the lock secure. Some companies, such as CRKT

and SOG, add a secondary lock-safe feature that keeps the lock closed. However, this doesn't prevent the lock from breaking when enough pressure is applied.

Handle geometry is really a personal preference. But a handle with a smooth profile and outline will not print as distinctly under your shirt or in your pocket. If you want a low-visibility folder, opt for these less angular handle designs. For grip, I recommend textured scales, such as G10.

DEPLOYMENT

■ **NO MATTER WHICH STYLE** knife you have, it isn't any good tucked away in your pocket or waistband. In order to use it, you have to first deploy it—and to deploy a knife smoothly under stress requires practice. The very nature of a folding knife requires it to be opened with fine motor skills, usually with a small thumb stud or disc on the side of the blade.

But fine motor skills can be compromised by stress. In order to guarantee smooth deployment during stress, you need to practice these four basic steps:

1. Locate the knife.
2. Remove the knife from concealment.
3. Open the blade.
4. Readjust your grip.

The more deeply concealed your knife is, the longer it takes to deploy. Emergency situations are time sensitive, whether you're protecting yourself from an attacker or cutting someone out of a burning vehicle. The more time and focus you spend on deploying your knife, the less time and focus you spend on tracking the problem at hand. So choose an easily accessible and consistent place to carry your knife.

Practice deploying from this same spot. You don't want to go searching for your knife during a stressful situation. With enough practice, your muscle memory will kick in at the time of need.

EXTRA EFFORT

■ **A TACTICAL FOLDER IS** a very practical everyday carry knife that can tackle myriad tasks. The convenience of slipping one into your pocket will make it more likely you will have it on you at all times. But the cost is the extra steps you have to take to deploy it.

Emergency situations present many obstacles to a person, so it is critical to know how to deploy and work your folding knife prior to any situation. Practice this and make it perfect. The knife will do you no good stuck in your pocket, or only halfway out.



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KERSHAW
CQC-4K

OPEN LENGTH: 7.4 IN. / **CLOSED LENGTH:** 4.2 IN. / **BLADE LENGTH:** 3.25 IN.
\$53 / KERSHAW.KAUIUSALTD.COM

Designed by martial artist Ernest Emerson, this model delivers an outstanding protective knife at an affordable cost. The thin blade profile is well suited for thrusting, and it is combined with a sturdy frame lock. It can be manually opened using the thumb disc or the patented Emerson Wave feature. The latter enables you to open the knife as you remove it from concealment. The black-oxide coating protects the blade and makes it non-reflective. The handle scales are made of G10 and provide a good grip, and the blade locks up via a sturdy frame lock.



CRKT
M16-14Z

OPEN LENGTH: 9.25 IN. / **CLOSED LENGTH:** 5.38 IN. / **BLADE LENGTH:** 3.88 IN.
\$80 / CRKT.COM

Designed by the late Kit Carson, this model can be found in many pockets, waistbands, and bags of many explorers, police officers, and soldiers. It comes in many iterations and blade profiles. This is a beefy, full-size working knife designed for large hands and heavy-duty tasks. The blade is made from durable AUS 8 high-carbon stainless steel. This version features a tanto tip with a partially serrated edge for cutting through rope and other tough material. The knife can be opened manually via the thumb stud, or flipped open with the Carson Flipper.



BENCHMADE
GRIPTILIAN

OPEN LENGTH: 6.78 IN. / **CLOSED LENGTH:** 3.87 IN. / **BLADE LENGTH:** 2.91 IN.
\$115 / BENCHMADE.COM

Another legacy design, the Griptilian is one of Benchmade's classics. It comes in all shapes and sizes. I like the small 3-inch-blade version with pink scales. The blade is made of 154 CM stainless steel, and it opens via a thumb stud and locks up with an Axis mechanism. There are serrated and non-serrated options available. It easily fits into a pocket, and its rounded edges help with concealment and are not prone to snag on clothing. For anyone who is uncomfortable carrying more aggressive-looking knives, it is a great option.

6 FOLDERS FOR EVERY TASK

THE ADAGE "THE RIGHT TOOL FOR THE RIGHT JOB" APPLIES WHEN SELECTING A KNIFE **BY ANTONIO BOLFO**



BENCHMADE
916 TRIAGE

OPEN LENGTH: 8.2 IN. / **CLOSED LENGTH:** 4.7 IN. / **BLADE LENGTH:** 3.5 IN.
\$190 / BENCHMADE.COM

This is a dedicated rescue knife, with its flat point, serrations, seat-belt cutter, and glass breaker. When cutting through seat belts or people's clothing to expose a wound, you don't want the tip to accidentally poke the victim—a risk if he is thrashing around. The G10 orange scales give it extra visibility and grip amidst the chaos of an emergency situation. There are numerous blade options, including black-coated or satin finish, with or without serrations. Blade steel is N680, with the seat-belt cutter made from 440C.



SOG
TRIDENT

OPEN LENGTH: 8.5 IN. / **CLOSED LENGTH:** 4.75 IN. / **BLADE LENGTH:** 3.75 IN.
\$103 / SOGNKNIVES.COM

You can tell exactly what the SOG Trident was meant to do just by looking at it. Its lines and profile are aggressive and fierce, and as a result it screams military. The blade has a black-coated finish for you ninjas out there, and the blade is made of AUS 8. This knife features SOG Assisted Technology (S.A.T.), which springs open and locks up with a piston mechanism. Check your local laws, since assisted-opening knives are illegal in some parts of the country. It also has a seat-belt cutter built into the frame.



TAVOR TACTICAL
COMBAT FOLDING KNIFE

OPEN LENGTH: 9 IN. / **CLOSED LENGTH:** 5.25 IN. / **BLADE LENGTH:** 4 IN.
\$325 / IWI.US

The Tavor is a good all-around knife that can stand up to abuse. The modified tanto tip can withstand being banged against hard surfaces and prying, but it also has a thin enough profile so that it is adequate for self defense. The blade is made from CPM 154 steel, and it can be opened via the Dual Arc Rapid Deployment thumb studs. The back spacers are made from aluminum, which prevents side-to-side play, and the 16-ball-bearing system ensures silky-smooth opening and closing. The pommel incorporates a glass breaker.

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RELOAD WITH RETENTION

A FAST, FOOLPROOF METHOD TO TOP OFF A SEMI-AUTO HANDGUN
BY CHRIS CHRISTIAN



YOU'VE JUST BEEN FORCED to use your concealed-carry semi-auto handgun to defend against a violent attack. The assault has stopped, but you don't know how many attackers might remain. Nor do you remember how many rounds you've fired. Getting a full magazine into your gun right now,

while retaining the partially filled magazine in case you need it later, would be smart. There are two techniques that can help you do that: the Tactical Reload (TR) and the Reload With Retention (RWR).

A COMPLEX OPTION

The TR requires the shooter to bring the new magazine to the gun, eject the partial magazine into the same hand, then insert the new magazine into the gun while stowing the partial. This complex maneuver—juggling two magazines in the same hand, quickly and under stress—requires much practice and is an invitation to drop one or both, especially

An advantage of the RWR is that it uses a simple set of motions that are easy to make part of your muscle memory.

with large double-stack magazines. It also requires that the magazine drop freely from the gun with the touch of a release button. Not all do, making the TR a poor choice with some handgun models.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

To execute the RWR, you simply strip the partial magazine from the gun, stow it somewhere on your person, then grab your spare magazine and slap it into the gun. (See sequence at right.) The key to speed is where you stow the partial magazine and how quickly your hand can grab the spare. The closer the partial is stowed to the spare, the faster the reload.

Those who wear pants and carry spare magazines in a belt holder on their weak side will find the weak-side front pants or cargo pocket an effective place. Shove the partial mag into the pocket and the empty hand coming out is perfectly positioned to grab the spare. Or, tuck it in the waistband near the spare. If you keep the spare in a purse or fanny pack, that's the logical place for the partial to go, right next to the spare. Some military Special Operations troops far from resupply simply drop their rifle magazines down the front of their shirt. That can work for handgun mags too.

Many self-defense experts consider the RWR to be more foolproof than the TR. It uses simple, positive movements that are already a part of any shooter's skill set, requires handling only one magazine at a time, and works with any semi-auto. In fact, IDPA matches sometimes require this type of reload, and while both the TR and the RWR are allowed, the vast majority of competitors use the RWR. Experience has shown it is more reliable under stress and actually faster at getting both hands into a shooting grip on a recharged gun.

Drill to Master the RWR

START AT HOME in normal street attire, with an empty gun and unloaded magazines. Determine where you want the partial to go in relation to where you normally carry your spare magazines. Practice stripping the magazine from the gun, stowing it there, and getting the new magazine into the gun. Once those movements become fluid, move to the range.

BEGIN WITH the gun on target. Fire one round. Make an RWR and immediately fire another round. Practice until you've achieved a shot-to-shot time of under five seconds. In the real world, use an RWR when you're in a safe spot and there is a defined stop in the hostilities.





PERSONAL DEFENSE

GEAR



AIMPOINT ACO

A SIMPLE, DURABLE, AND AFFORDABLE SIGHT FOR CARBINES BY JOHN B. SNOW



THE AIMPOINT CARBINE Optic (hence ACO) is a basic red-dot system that comes ready to mount on any rifle with a Picatinny-style rail. The height of the mounting bracket works in conjunction with the stock geometry of standard AR- or AK-type rifles to give the shooter a proper cheek weld. The sight has an ergonomic on/off knob with 10 settings: the off position, and nine levels of brightness, ranging from a dim dot for low light to ultra bright for sunny conditions.

TOUGH BUGGER

► **I HAVE BEEN** using and abusing my ACO for several months, running it on different rifles, and it has taken all the punishment in stride. Battery life is laughably long: A single 3V lithium battery provides more than a full year of continuous use. The price is right too: At \$393, it is a good value. (aimpoint.com)

RAB CUMMINGS

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FISHING INSIDER

TIP

Avoid muddy lakes when night-fishing. Clear water with a visibility of 2 to 4 feet is ideal for bass fishing after dark.

BASS IN A NEW LIGHT

WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN, FLIP ON THE LIGHTS AND GET IN ON SUMMER'S BEST BASS FISHING

BY TRAVIS FAULKNER



T

THE HOT AND HUMID months of summer always seem to transform bass fishing lakes into a downright mess—impoundments chock-full of supsize cabin cruisers, runabouts, and jet-skis. Once the sun goes down, though, the crowds generally clear out and bass that were previously inactive begin to feed heavily again. A few modifications to your tackle and gear are all it takes to get things cranking from dusk till dawn.

Custom
black-light
systems
brighten the
night.

COURTESY OF TRAVIS FAULKNER

OL

A big Kentucky smallmouth bass comes to hand.

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► THE BLACKOUT KNOCKOUT

One of the first steps in creating a high-impact night-fishing arsenal is to spool up with clear/blue fluorescent monofilament line. This type of line is inexpensive and lights up like a glowing blue laser on the surface when you use it with a black light—which is my secret weapon. Currently, there are a variety of black lights to choose from. One of the most innovative and convenient models is the new Nightfashion Plus (nightfashion.net). This complete customizable black-light system fits directly onto your boat's rub rail. During the day, it's virtually undetectable, but with a flip of a switch at night, nearly 360 degrees of lighting illuminates every possible casting angle. Plus, it has a dimmer switch that allows you to adjust the intensity based on the moonlight and fishing conditions.

► CALL THEM FROM COVER

When daytime temperatures heat up, bass generally suspend deep off the breaks of points, ledges, and submerged islands or humps. As temperatures drop at night, they move up into the shallows to feed. I like to greet them with loud and bold lures.

A large single Colorado-blade spinnerbait rigged with a rubber imitation craw or chunk trailer puts off a great deal of fish-enticing vibration and can be fished at a variety of depths. Another deadly nighttime lure is a standard jig tipped with a chunk trailer that directly mimics the natural actions of shad and even crayfish. Crawling the jig and popping it across the bottom imitates crayfish coming out from beneath their rocky hides to feed at night. If bass are aggressively feeding on shad, switch to a swimming jig.

Under the right conditions, nothing turns on the bite, or builds more excitement, better than surface lures such as prop-baits, Jitterbugs, and buzzbaits. A big bass smashing a topwater on a dead-calm summer night is what fishing dreams are made of.

MOONLIGHT COLOR ADJUSTMENTS

► Moon and cloud cover should guide your lure color selection. On pitch-black nights with little to no moonlight, go with solid black, brown, or blue. Under a bright moon or on a clear, starlit night, switch over to loud color combinations, such as green/orange or even red/chartreuse. On partially cloudy nights, go with red/black, blue/black, or green/black.

DOUBLE TROUBLE

TOP TANDEM RIGS FOR TOUGH FISH **BY PHILIP MONAHAN**

F

FOR THE MAJORITY OF

flyfishermen, the basic rig is very simple: a single fly tied to the end of a tapered leader. Let the casting begin. It all obviously works fine—most of the time. But what if I told you that, in many situations, you could increase your catch rate by fishing two flies

instead of one? Further, what if I added that creating such a tandem rig is much simpler than you imagine?

Multi-fly rigs have been around for hundreds of years—in fact, British fishermen in the late 1800s were known to use “ladders” or “straps” of up to 10 flies at once—but the practice gradually fell out of favor in this country. Building a special leader with a dropper line on the tag end of a blood knot always seemed pretty fussy to me. But then one day I saw a Montana guide simply knot the dropper to the bend of the top fly, and I mentally slapped myself for not having thought of

A streamer-and-nymph tandem rig.



JUSTIN APPENZELLER

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such a simple solution on my own.

True, tying an improved clinch knot to the bend of a hook isn't as easy as tying one at the eye—the loop at the bottom of the clinch knot tends to slide off the hook just as you try to thread the tag end through—but you can solve this problem by simply holding the top fly upside down (point up). The length of the dropper line should be determined by the water depth and speed, but 18 to 24 inches is a good place to start. If you still struggle with creating tandem rigs on the water, tie the two flies together at home and carry the complete rigs in leader envelopes. Then all you have to do is tie on the top fly, and you're in business.

USEFUL COMBINATIONS

Once you've mastered tying the in-line dropper rig, your options are wide open. Here are a few of the common situations and strategies in which two flies work better than one.

• **TWO DRY FLIES:** If you know exactly which flies the fish are hitting, you can simply tie on two of the same pattern, thus doubling your chances of a strike. Or use this to figure out which pattern is working best, since you can test twice as many

patterns with a tandem rig.

When fish are feeding on tiny flies, it can be difficult to see your minuscule imitation on the water. If that's the case, tie on a big, bushy fly, and then add the smaller fly on a 24-inch dropper. That way, the larger fly serves as a locator and a strike indicator—when a fish hits the size 22 fly, the bigger size 10 fly will disappear, too.

• **DRY FLY AND A NYMPH:** When you have no idea what the fish are eating and you want to cover a lot of water, use a large attractor-pattern dry fly paired with a generalist nymph—such as a Beadhead Hare's Ear Nymph or a Prince Nymph—as a dropper. The theory behind this is that you're presenting each fish with two options. The most popular version of this combo is the hopper-dropper, in which the nymph is attached to a high-floating grasshopper imitation—a rig that's tough to beat on a late-summer afternoon.

• **TWO NYMPHS:** The double-nymph rig is based on the same theory as the double-dry, and it also helps you control the depth of the flies. If you know that the fish want something diminutive—such as a size 18

Pheasant Tail—right on the bottom, instead of loading up the line with split shot, drop the Pheasant Tail from a heavily weighted nymph. This rig is much easier to cast than one with split shot, and there's always the chance that some lunger will find your larger offering attractive.

• **TWO STREAMERS:** In the fall, when they're trying to fatten up for the long winter, trout become more predatory. This is when throwing a two-streamer tandem rig can draw savage strikes. Use 16 inches of heavy tippet, 0X or 1X, between the flies to avoid break-offs.

• **A STREAMER AND A NYMPH:** This is the least common tandem rig, but it works well in still water. The larger fly will often get even the most lethargic fish interested, and when the nymph comes swimming by, it's just too hard to resist. An Olive Woolly Bugger followed by an olive, jointed damselfly imitation is a killer combo virtually any time of year.

If you've never tried fishing a tandem rig, give it a shot. There's nothing very complicated about the setup, and it literally doubles your chance of a hookup.

GET A HANDLE ON YOUR GEAR

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FISHING



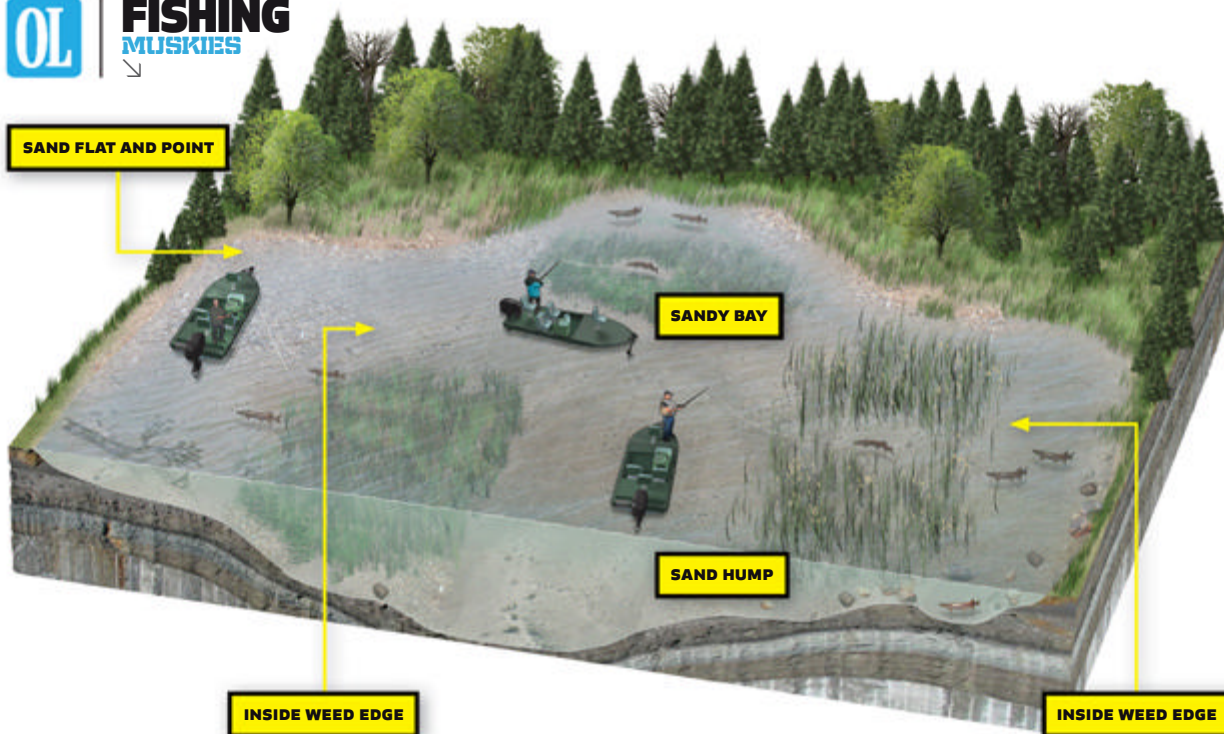
MUSKIES

SECRETS OF SAND

My bomb cast arced high through the May sky, landing solidly in the shallows with an audible *thunk*. The entire distance from bucktail to boat appeared to be a sand-bottomed shoal, save for a lone dark spot indicating slightly deeper water about 10 reel cranks in. Not what many would think of as an ideal spot for a muskie to live. As the Mepps bridged that gap, an olive-green missile launched from the darkness, smacking the spinner.

BY STEVE HEITING

TOSH BROWN



THE CANNIBAL
Muskies do not nibble. They swallow ducks and muskrats whole. The fish's ruthless appetite gives rise to some of the most diverse—and coolest-looking—baits ever concocted.

Witness: the Cannibal (below). This muskie-lookalike swim-bait was carved by Ryan Goetze of Waconia, Minnesota, and won Best of Show in the Muskie Lure World Championship. His inspiration? A pike he caught last summer that had tooth marks on it. "I thought if I made a muskie-shaped lure, I might catch one."



My hookset was solid and the battle with the big muskie proved spectacular, with every head shake and gyration plainly visible in the transparent water. Without much room to swim, the fish twice took to the air. The muskie was soon in the net, and it was released.

At first glance, fishing over sandy bottoms for muskies seems to be sheer folly. This is extreme shallow-water fishing—usually 6 feet or less. And because the bottom is somewhat featureless, it's easy to assume that it is also fishless. But appearances can be deceiving when it comes to muskie habitat. Shallow, sandy areas often hold the warmest water in a lake, and thus attract swarms of baitfish—and muskies.

This happens from just after they spawn all the way until late summer, when the waters begin to cool again. Every muskie angler should work sandy areas into their daily game plan.

SIZING UP THE SAND

I target four different sand locations for muskies:

1 SAND FLATS These are nothing more than subtle points or shallow spots extending from the shoreline before giving way to deep water—a beach, for lack of a better term. The larger the flat or point, the better the odds that it will contain additional cover or structure and the greater the chance that muskies will be using it. In clear-water lakes early in the season, muskies will often lie in the sun on sand flats as they recover from spawning.

2 SANDY BAYS The back ends of bays often feature weed growth separating deeper water from the shallow sanctuary behind. The weeds will provide ambush cover for muskies and act as a barrier that helps insulate the back of the bay from colder main-

lake water in late spring to early summer. The weeds at the mouth of the bay attract the most angler attention, but it's the sand flat behind the weeds that hold the most active muskies.

3 INSIDE WEED EDGES In many lakes, lush weeds grow in a zone that extends from 3- or 4-foot shallows to the depth where reduced sunlight limits further growth—usually at 6 to 14 feet, depending on water clarity. This outside weed edge is popular with fishermen, but it's the inside weed edge—the zone from the shoreline out to where the weeds start—that is often overlooked. As with the sand bays, the inside weed-edge zone will be warmed by the sun and shielded from the cooler main-lake waters by the vegetation.

4 SAND HUMPS Rising up from the depths, sandy humps are often the least consistent of the sand areas because they're too deep to be warmed much by the sun. However, if boulders, scattered weeds, or man-made fish cribs exist on such spots, they hold great appeal to muskies.

WORKING THE SAND

In the spring, anglers should beef up the hooks and split rings of lipless, rattling bass-sized crankbaits and rapidly fan-cast sand flats for post-spawn fish. On clear-water lakes, use jigs and reapers to sight-fish for muskies lying in the sun.

In the summer, muskies will scatter along flats, so it's important to cover water quickly with bucktails and topwaters. If weed growth is thick or the flat is punctuated with reeds or bulrushes, use a streamlined spinnerbait like a Slopmaster.

In this day of more and better-equipped muskie hunters, sandy areas remain overlooked hotspots. Try them this season and you may be in for sudden strikes and spectacular fights in skinny water.

TAKING DOWN THE KING

HOW (AND WHERE) TO CROSS TARPON OFF YOUR BUCKET LIST—AND DO IT ON YOUR OWN **BY DAVE LEAR**



Florida anglers work the currents beneath and beyond the Seven Mile Bridge in Marathon.

T

Triple-digit weights, stubborn dispositions, and acrobatic tendencies make tarpon perhaps the most iconic inshore gamefish that swims. Booking an experienced guide is one way for novice anglers to fulfill one of their greatest fishing dreams. But with the right tactics and tackle, it's not difficult to target tarpon on your own in a small to midsize boat or even a kayak. And according to Captain Ron Harper, a seasoned lure expert from Apalachicola, Florida, the best way to catch the king is to plunk him with artificials.

"First, use the trolling motor to search for fish," says Harper. "Focus on bays, passes, or pinchpoints like the mouths of coastal rivers where you find bait. Watch for rolling fish and those suspended or laid up just below the surface. You might also see pushes and wakes in the water that indicate movement or maybe just a fin tip. Tarpon fishing is a lot like deer hunting—you don't always see the whole fish."

When he spots fish, Harper gauges the current and leads fish by casting 10 to 15 feet ahead of their projected path. He then employs a slow, steady retrieve to swim the plug realistically. "Normally the fish will come up from behind or the side and slurp it in," he adds.

Many first-timers opt to use bait, but Harper believes he can catch just as many tarpon on lures. His favorites are soft-plastic DOA BaitBuster

mullet imitations, followed by Bomber Long A plugs and MirrOlure suspending twitch baits. If the fish are in depths of 4 feet or less, he'll switch to Slug-Gos or similar plastic flukes for stealthier presentations.

Harper matches his tackle with enough backbone to land fish pushing the 100-pound mark without wearing his clients out. He uses either a 7-foot 6-inch medium-heavy fast-action St. Croix Tidemas-

ter spinning rod with a 5000 Shimano Stradic reel or a 12- to 25-pound-class Avid casting rod with a Curado 300 baitcasting reel. Both are loaded with 30-pound dark green or yellow Power Pro braided line. For a leader, he adds 4 feet of 30- to 40-pound-test monofilament followed by 18 inches of 60-pound bite leader (or fluoro-carbon if the water is really clear), connected with Trilene knots. The lures are tied on with a non-

slip mono loop knot.

Tarpon have very bony mouths, so set the hook hard several times after the strike. It's important to maintain constant pressure and pull in the opposite direction to turn the fish's head and keep it from gulping more rejuvenating air. When the fish goes airborne, point the tip toward the fish to add slack. This is appropriately known as bowing to the fish. After all, you are in the presence of royalty.

THE DEADLY DIY HALF DOZEN

WHERE: Marathon, Florida Keys
THE SCOOP: Let a DOA TerrorEyz dangle in the current beneath the Seven Mile Bridge and hang on.

WHERE: Apalachicola Bay, FL
THE SCOOP: Trophy tarpon migrate through this diverse estuary from May through October.

WHERE: Grand Isle, LA
THE SCOOP: Down at the end of the bayou, CoonPop jigs are renowned tarpon takers.

WHERE: Galveston, TX
THE SCOOP: The kings of Tarpon Alley, a 2-mile stretch of water just off the beachfront, are making a strong comeback.

WHERE: St. Simons, GA
THE SCOOP: Cast a large twitch bait at early risers during the mid-summer months along the coast.

WHERE: Hilton Head, SC
THE SCOOP: Swimming mullet and poggy plugs are the Low Country secrets for the late summer and early autumn months.

CATCH THE DRIFT

EIGHT UNDER-THE-RADAR TROUT STREAMS THAT PRODUCE OVER-THE-TOP ANGLING **BY JEFF ERICKSON**

We were surrounded by bugs and rises in the most intense hatch I had ever seen. It seemed like every trout in the stream was feeding aggressively. It had to be a famous event and location, like the Green Drake hatch on Idaho's Henrys Fork or the evening caddis explosion on Montana's Missouri, right? Wrong. I was in a state better known for corn-fed hogs than trout—Iowa.



The fertile spring creeks of the Upper Midwest's Driftless Region make up some of the best trout water most anglers have never heard of. This unique area—sheltering wild browns, native brookies, stocked rainbows, and small-mouth bass—includes southwestern Wisconsin, southeastern Minnesota, northeastern Iowa, and a sliver of northwestern Illinois.

In this Alice in Wonderland-like terrain, you can drive through an upland cornfield, then unexpectedly plunge down the proverbial rabbit hole into a 400-foot-deep trout-stream valley, road twisting though a ravine of hardwoods,

limestone outcrops, and wild-turkey heaven. Although the Driftless holds more than 600 trout streams, these eight gems are sure-fire favorites.

WHITEWATER RIVER, MINNESOTA

► The Whitewater watershed offers dozens of miles of prime trout water, most of it public. The web of streams includes the North, South, Middle, and Main Branches, and tiny tributaries like Beaver Creek. Access is readily available in Whitewater and Carley State Parks, as well as the sprawling Whitewater Wildlife Management Area,

which also affords excellent fall hunting. The parks offer camping, hiking, and other outdoor recreation opportunities—good places for the entire family.

SOUTH BRANCH ROOT RIVER, MINNESOTA

► The South Branch encompasses one of the most expansive trout watersheds in the Driftless Region, large enough to canoe in its lower reaches. Two wonderful spring creeks feed the South Branch in the park—Canfield and Forestville Creeks—gushing full blown from cliff-side caves.

TROUT RUN CREEK, MINNESOTA

► Trout Run has long been lauded as one of Minnesota's most productive wild brown trout streams, winding through a bucolic landscape that evokes the famous spring creeks of Pennsylvania and England. While most of the adjacent land is private,

Southeastern Minnesota's Trout Run is a classic Driftless Region spring creek, filled with thousands of brown trout per mile. Public access is plentiful.



the Minnesota DNR has done an admirable job of acquiring angler easements, so much of this superb stream is open to the public.

KINNICKINNIC RIVER, WISCONSIN

► The "Kinni," as it is known locally, is one of the Midwest's most popular and beloved trout streams, hosting strong populations of wild browns and brookies that often exceed more than 7,000 per mile. The congenial college town of River Falls divides the Kinni into two reaches: a slower, colder upper portion, and a faster canyon run below town. Public access is good throughout.

RUSH RIVER, WISCONSIN

► Located southeast of the Kinni, the Rush is renowned for producing some of the Midwest's largest browns, bruisers that fatten up on crayfish and minnows. A good place to access this stretch is a mile downstream from the hamlet of El Paso.

WATERLOO CREEK, IOWA

► Many anglers might be surprised to see "trout" and "Iowa" in the same



sentence, but the rugged northeast corner of the state hides many fine spring creeks. Waterloo is one of the best. It's also a geographical oddity, beginning as Bee Creek in Minnesota, then changing names as it flows south into Iowa, toward the flea-sized town of Dorchester. Here, one might accomplish the unusual feat of hooking a trout in one state and landing it another.

NORTH AND SOUTH BEAR CREEKS, IOWA

► The two upper branches of Bear



A fly-caught wild brown comes to the net on Trout Run Creek in Minnesota.

Creek are similar in that the Iowa DNR has purchased substantial portions of land along each, offering fishing and hunting access along with primitive camping. North Bear, however, is one of my true Driftless loves. I grew up fishing these streams, have prowled them for decades, and they're the primary reason I still point my fly-rod-loaded truck east on I-90 at least once a year to hook Driftless.

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BIGGER, BADDER BASS

BIOLOGISTS AROUND THE COUNTRY ARE PAYING ATTENTION TO A FISHERIES PROJECT GONE INCREDIBLY RIGHT **BY JAY SHERIDAN**



Gabe Keen shattered the long-standing Tennessee largemouth record with this 15-pound 3-ounce lunker.

"Now your five fish had better go 30 pounds if you want to be in it."

A RUNAWAY STRAIN

Tennessee began experimenting with Florida bass introductions in the late 1990s. But the program was slow to catch hold. In 2005, after stocking hundreds of thousands of Florida-strain fingerlings, samples revealed that less than 5 percent of the bass population was carrying the Florida-strain F-1 gene.

"When they started the Florida-bass stocking I remember the biologists explaining that the environmental factors, coupled with the genetics, could create the perfect storm," says Scenic City Fishing Charters guide and outdoor writer Richard Sims. "But it took some trial and error."

Tennessee fisheries biologists decided to change their approach, stocking larger fingerlings ahead of the native bass spawn for competitive advantage. Five years later, in 2010, the results were remarkably different, with more than 30 percent of sample bass showing the Florida gene. The next year, the size and number of big bass being caught started to explode. By 2013, when 45 tournament fish weighing more than 8 pounds each were tested, every one of them carried the mark. But none were pure Florida bass.

Chief of fisheries for the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, Bobby Wilson, says the

Florida-bass program was not without risk.

"The question was, what would happen when we started crossing northern largemouth bass with the Floridas?" says Wilson. "Could we end up with an inferior fish down the line? The first-generation cross, what we call the F-1, has shown so far to offer the best characteristics of both fish—big and aggressive. So we introduce Florida bass to breed with the native population, and they produce many times more F-1 offspring than we could ever feasibly stock. I would say it has exceeded our expectations."

So much so that the state announced an expansion of the program earlier this year to include four other large reservoirs.

Bass weighing more than 13 pounds are being caught with astonishing regularity on Chickamauga, and now there's no reason to believe another record isn't lying in wait.

Gabe Keen knew he had a monster largemouth on the line as soon as he felt the hit. But it wasn't until the boat scale settled at 15.3 pounds that he realized he'd shattered the 61-year-old Tennessee state record.

Slow-rolling an umbrella rig over a ledge in the near-freezing February water, Keen knew enticing a big egg-laden female to strike would be tough. Any bite, though, could have been the one.

That promise has been the talk around Chickamauga Lake for a few years now, as the state's Florida-strain bass stocking program began producing eye-popping results. Keen, a high school history teacher and fishing team coach who runs the tournament circuit on weekends, grew up on the lake and has seen the evolution.

"It's always been a great lake, but when I started tournament fishing in 2009, a 15-pound, five-fish bag might have won," Keen says.

POPULAR SCIENCE



Florida bass have been swimming outside their home state since the late 1950s, in California, where a 20-plus-pound bass was first caught in 1972. Over the years,

Biologist Brandon Ragland samples tissue from Chickamauga bass.

states from Alabama and Arkansas to Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas have actively stocked the larger-growing fish to mate with native northern bass and create heavyweight hybrids. In 2014, Arizona became the latest state to join

the fraternity.

The cutoff point lies around the 35th parallel, because whether the fish thrive depends on the number of heating days available to maintain optimal water temperatures in the subtropic range. North

of that line, Florida strains have consistently struggled.

Florida bass programs were designed to create trophy fisheries. These fish are notoriously hard to catch but grow large more quickly than northern-strain fish.

CUTTING-EDGE BLADES

THREE DISTINCTIVE SPINNER RIGS THAT BRING EXTRAORDINARY RESULTS **BY ROSS ROBERTSON**

Fishing the common spinner rig (aka nightcrawler harness) is hands-down the simplest and most popular way to put walleyes in the boat. Consisting of unassuming components—a couple of hooks, a leader, a few beads, and a spinner blade—Lindy rigging took walleye fishing by storm in the late 1960s, and anglers have tinkered with it ever since. But of those parts, spinner blades seem to garner the most attention from fishing fiddlers. While Colorado blades are very productive, throwing one of these three wacky blades can help you catch finicky spring fish.

The author holds a spring Lake Erie walleye caught on a crawler rig with a pink No. 8 Indiana blade.

FISHING
WALLEYES

OL



SUPER-SIZE INDIANAS



► Indiana blades in the smaller No. 3 to No. 5 sizes are somewhat popular on smaller bodies of water, but because of their added flash and supercharged vibration, larger No. 6 and No. 8 sizes can be true game changers.

The No. 6 excels when you're fishing clear or slightly off-color water, whereas the No. 8 is a go-to for tournament anglers fishing off-color and dirty water or when big fish are the primary target.

The No. 8 is more prone to being thrown off a quick-change clevis, making a folded clevis a better choice to save blades and dollars. Because these blades are longer, adding beads will help clear the front hook of the harness and avoid short strikes.

HATCHET HELPERS



► The hatchet and similarly shaped Doc Sheldon blades are often used on tandem rigs and provide a rather unusual presentation when trolled (blades rotate in opposite directions). Much like Indiana blades, Hatchets offer both vibration and flash, and can be run at a variety of speeds.

Sizes No. 4 to No. 6 are most popular, but don't overlook larger sizes when fishing in off-color water or when large baitfish and walleyes are present. Hatchets truly shine when they're fished deep on bottom bouncers and three-way rigs. Speed changes can add even more flash. Purposely stalling a planer board or pumping a handheld rod can impart a unique flutter to the rig, making it hard for walleyes to pass up.

CHOPPER DOWN



► Chopper blades are the most distinctive of this dynamic trio. The odd shape gives this rig a gaudy flash and lateral-line-triggering vibration. Much of this is due to its deep cup and turned-up lip.

Size can be very important with choppers. Start with larger sizes that put off more vibration in early spring, and switch to smaller sizes and faster speeds as spring progresses to early summer. Regardless of the time of year, match the size used to the speed you are drifting or trolling. Nos. 3 to 6 are best.

You may have to hunt down these odd-ball blades, but here are three websites that carry a large variety: erieoutfitters.com; smokekeysonthebayshop.com; and franksgreatoutdoors.com.

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• Weighs 245 lbs.

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69387/62270/62591

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ITEM 69052
69111/62522/62573

Item 69052 shown

\$6.99
VALUE

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20-60 x 60mm SPOTTING SCOPE WITH TRIPOD

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SAVE 42%

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METRIC LOT NO. 42305/69044

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SAVE \$70

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LOT NO. 67847
61454/61693

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NEW

LOT NO. 68146/61258
61297/61840

Item 61258 shown

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69688
60771

Item 92655 shown

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69054
62603

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LOT NO. 61523 60395
62923/62493

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2745/69094
61916

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10 FT. x 10 FT. POPUP CANOPY

SAVE OVER \$42

LOT NO. 69456
62384
62513

Item 62384 shown

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LOT NO. 68496
61363
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61360
X-LARGE LOT NO. 68498
61359

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LOT NO. 68099/45252
69606/61173

Item 68099 shown

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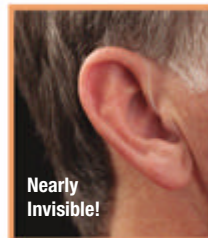


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MY BUDDY JOHNNY AND I WERE FISHING ONE OF OUR FAVORITE SPOTS ON A SMALL LAKE IN SOUTHERN ARKANSAS WHEN HE GOT A BACKLASH.



HE WAS TRYING TO FIX THE TANGLE WHEN A YOUNG BARN OWL FLEW DOWN TO SNATCH UP THE FLOATING BAIT.

THE **HOOKS** SNAGGED THE OWL'S TALONS, AND JOHNNY HAULED IN THE BIRD TO HELP IT.



I WRAPPED THE JUVENILE OWL IN A CLOTH TO KEEP IT FROM THRASHING AROUND...

...AND JOHNNY WENT TO WORK **FREEING** THE **HOOKS** FROM ITS SHARP TALONS.



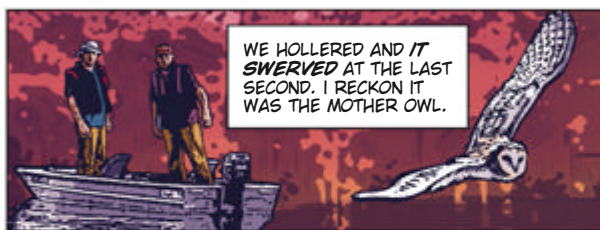
I RELEASED THE BIRD BACK ON THE WATER, AND IT **SWAM** OFF, UNHURT.



TWO DAYS LATER IN THE SAME SPOT, JOHNNY HAD **ANOTHER BACKLASH.**



I LOOKED UP TO SEE A **FULL-GROWN OWL** SWOOPING DOWN ON US!



WE **HOLLERED** AND IT **SWERVED** AT THE LAST SECOND. I RECKON IT WAS THE **MOTHER OWL.**



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